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Commission on the Status of Women
Background Guide 2019

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Ksenia Shevtsova and Katie Conti, Assistant Directors

NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2019 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to welcome you to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year's staff are: Directors Rym Bendimerad (Conference A) and Shelsy Mireles Venegas (Conference B), and Assistant Directors Ksenia Shevtsova (Conference A) and Katie Conti (Conference B). Rym recently graduated from the MA Human Rights program at University College London (UCL) and currently resides in Qatar, where she works as an intern for Al Jazeera. Shelsy completed her BA in Supply Chain Management in 2017 and is now working at Hewlett Packard Enterprise as a Financial Analyst. Ksenia holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok. There, she works as an analyst, focusing her research on multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific region. Katie currently works at a nonpartisan think tank in Washington, DC that conducts scholarship across topic areas within domestic and international affairs. She received a BA in International Relations, Public Communications, and Geography from Syracuse University.

The topics under discussion for the Commission on the Status of Women are:

1. Promoting Women's Access to Information and Communication Technologies
2. Advancing Economic Parity for Rural Women
3. Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality

CSW is the principal intergovernmental body dedicated to the advancement and advocacy of gender equality and the empowerment of women around the globe. CSW prepares reports presented to the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the status of women's equality and its progress in furthering this cause. Additionally, it produces Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme discussed at its annual plenary meeting. It will be key for delegates to emulate the normative and best practice-setting approaches of the Commission's annual plenary meetings.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 March 2019 in accordance with the guidelines in the NMUN Position Paper Guide.

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, that serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions are the:

1. *NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide* - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. *NMUN Rules of Procedure* - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory NMUN Conduct Expectations on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretaries-General for the Economic and Social Council Department, Estefani Morales (Conference A) and Stéphanie Toschi (Conference B), at usg.ecosoc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Conference A

Rym Bendimerad, Director
Ksenia Shevtsova, Assistant Director

Conference B

Shelsy Mireles Venegas, Director
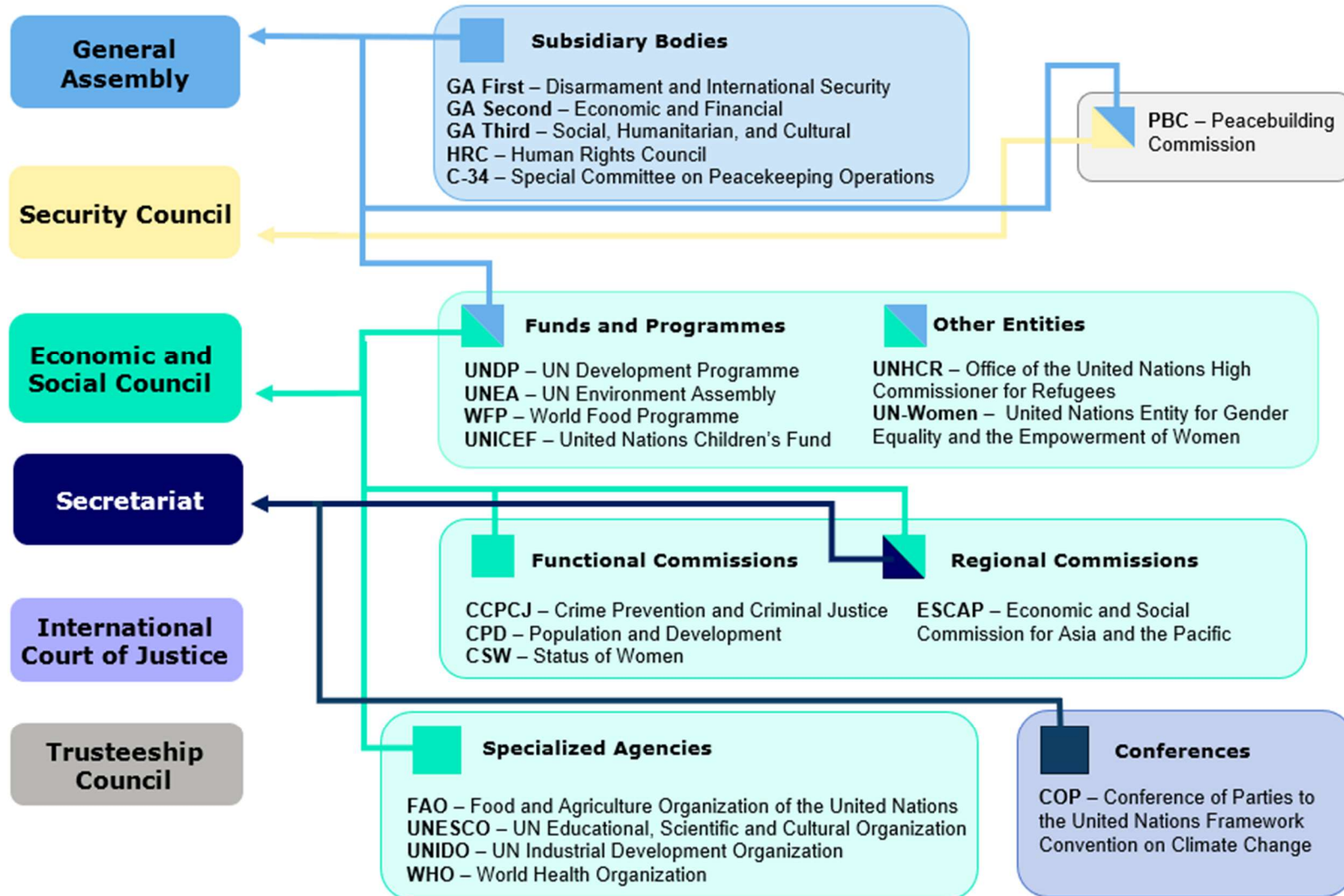Katie Conti, Assistant Director

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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.

General Assembly

Security Council

Economic and Social Council

Secretariat

International Court of Justice

Trusteeship Council

Subsidiary Bodies

GA First – Disarmament and International Security
GA Second – Economic and Financial
GA Third – Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural
HRC – Human Rights Council
C-34 – Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations

PBC – Peacebuilding Commission

Funds and Programmes

UNDP – UN Development Programme
UNEA – UN Environment Assembly
WFP – World Food Programme
UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

Other Entities

UNHCR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN-Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Functional Commissions

CCPCJ – Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
CPD – Population and Development
CSW – Status of Women

Regional Commissions

ESCAP – Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Specialized Agencies

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
UNESCO – UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDO – UN Industrial Development Organization
WHO – World Health Organization

Conferences

COP – Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Committee Overview

Introduction

The UN General Assembly's adoption of the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) marked a significant milestone toward the achievement of gender equality on the international agenda.[1] Although decades have passed since its adoption, women continue to remain disproportionately subjected to gender inequality, discrimination, and exploitation throughout many parts of the world.[2]

Despite recent global efforts, the overall progress toward the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remains relatively slow.[3] Addressing such challenges is crucial for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.[4] The achievement of the SDGs is moreover dependent on alleviating gender inequality, which remains one of the leading causes of hunger and poverty for women and girls.[5] According to the World Food Programme (WFP), approximately 60% of people across the international community likely to be subjected to chronic hunger are women and girls.[6] The informal work sector constitutes a main source of employment for women worldwide, especially in developing countries.[7] Women are estimated to consist of up to 85% of all home-based workers alone and are often subjected to larger gender pay gaps in this sector, leading to cycles of poverty and inequality.[8] The Women's Major Group, which facilitates the contributions of women's civil society organizations (CSOs) in the United Nations' (UN) work on sustainable development, has stressed the prevailing economic discrimination of women, who take on about 80% of the burden of domestic and unpaid care work.[9] Furthermore, in 2016 the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) reported that only 22.5% of members in parliaments worldwide were women.[10] In 2018, however, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) highlighted that this percentage had risen to 23.7%.[11] These figures demonstrate the need for further action by the international community to promote gender equality, especially within the framework of the SDGs, and to focus on ending the most pervasive form of discrimination of our times: the discrimination against women and girls.[12]

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), along with its secretariat, UN-Women, is the most significant international actor working with Member States and civil society in order to create a discrimination-free world where women and girls are able to fully participate in the economic, political, and social spheres of their societies.[13] In 1946, the first efforts by the UN to address women's issues were carried out in a sub-commission of the Commission on Human Rights.[14] However, it became clear that the empowerment of women deserved more attention and stronger commitment from Member States.[15] As a result of the debates in 1946, CSW was established in the same year as a fully functional commission under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) through ECOSOC

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[1] UN-Women, *Global norms and standards: Ending violence against women*, 2018.

[2] UN-Women, *Economic Empowerment,* 2018.

[3] UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018.

[4] Ibid.

[5] UN-Women, *Economic Empowerment*, 2018.

[6] UN-Women, *Facts & Figures*, 2018.

[7] Alter Chen, *Women in the Informal Sector: A Global Picture, the Global Movement*.

[8] Ibid., p. 4.

[9] Women's Major Group, *Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 Presents a Bold Vision for Women and Girls Advocates Gear Up for Work to Come*, 2015; Women's Major Group, *The Women's Group Role and Organisation.*

[10] Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*, 2016.

[11] UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 14.

[12] Ibid.

[13] UN CSW, *Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/CN .6/2018/L.7)*, 2018.

[14] UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006, p. 1.

[15] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

resolution 11(II).[16] CSW now represents the main intergovernmental policymaking body within the UN in the area of women's empowerment, promotion of women's rights, and gender equality.[17] As a functional commission of ECOSOC, it reports to ECOSOC annually.[18] Its main priority is to mainstream gender equality within the UN system and link women's empowerment to sustainable development.[19] UN-Women provides support throughout all features of the work performed by CSW, and furthermore serves to help facilitate civil society actors' participation in the Commission.[20]

CSW has been the driving force behind the ongoing process of creating and implementing international norms related to the advancement of women.[21] CSW's work is mainly guided by the principles of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979), the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) (1995), and the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly as a follow-up to BPfA, entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" (2000).[22] Additionally, UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women and Peace and Security" has been an influential guiding document.[23] In particular, the BPfA is crucial for CSW's work since it outlined the goals that the international community has set in order to achieve gender equality, such as ensuring the full implementation of women's human rights and promoting women's economic independence.[24]

The 20th anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing and concluded with the BPfA as an outcome document, was marked in 2015.[25] This took place at a pivotal moment for the UN, during the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the newly adopted SDGs.[26] Beijing+20 drew particular attention to 12 critical areas of concern for the continued empowerment of women, women and economy, women and the media, and women and poverty.[27] The challenges toward the implementation of the BPfA were addressed during CSW 59, which was concluded with an examination of potential opportunities for the global community in order to achieve gender equality in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.[28]

Governance, Structure, and Membership

The Commission consists of 45 Member States, elected for four-year terms.[29] The allocation of seats follows proportional geographical distribution and is comprised of 13 African states, 11 Asia-Pacific states, four Eastern European states, nine Latin American and Caribbean states, and eight Western European and Other states.[30] The chair and the four Vice-Chairs of the Commission's Bureau rotate without specific geographical regulations and are elected for two-year terms.[31] The Bureau addresses all necessary preparation for the annual meetings of CSW, identifying emerging issues, trends, focus areas, or possible new approaches to implementing the BPfA and all other relevant policy guidelines, and providing the findings as a summary of the Chair.[32] This work is done in consultation with all the Member States of the Commission and the regional groups, experts, and other relevant stakeholders, promoting

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[16] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2018.
[17] Ibid.
[18] New Zealand, Foreign Ministry of Trade and Affairs, *United Nations Handbook 2017-18*, 2017.
[19] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2018.
[20] Ibid.
[21] UN-Women, *A Brief History of the CSW*.
[22] UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006, pp. 9-15.
[23] Ibid.
[24] UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.
[25] UN-Women, *Beijing+20: Recommitting for Women and Girls*, 2015.
[26] Ibid.
[27] UN-Women, *Summary Report: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20,* 2015.
[28] UN-Women, *CSW59/Beijing+20 (2015),* 2015.
[29] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2018.
[30] New Zealand, Foreign Ministry of Trade and Affairs, *United Nations Handbook 2017-18*, 2017.
[31] Ibid.
[32] UN CSW, *Report on the 59th session (E/2015/27-E/CN .6/2015/10)*, 2015, pp. 11-15.

interactive dialogue, such as high-level ministerial panels or expert group meetings.[33] The Bureau is supported in its actions by UN-Women, which provides the Commission with reports on the discussed topics, as well as national and regional reviews on the implementation of the policies set forth by CSW and ECOSOC.[34] The Commission works together with the General Assembly and ECOSOC in a multi-tiered intergovernmental process to provide normative guidance to achieve of gender equality.[35]

In 2010, the UN's institutional setup and operational framework engaged on women's issues underwent significant restructuring in order to streamline efforts in achieving goals on gender equality.[36] The four major UN agencies that addressed women's issues merged and resulted in the establishment of UN-Women.[37] As of 2010, UN-Women is the Secretariat of CSW and provides guidance for operational activities aimed at the advancement of women.[38] UN-Women supports the work of CSW substantively by providing annual documentation on critical areas of concern regarding gender equality and facilitates the interaction between the Commission and CSOs at its annual meeting.[39] Moreover, the Commission has one Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women, which is in charge of producing a yearly report to CSW identifying "trends and patterns of reliably-attested injustice and discriminatory practices against women."[40]

In June 2016, ECOSOC adopted resolution 2016/3 to provide recommendations and define the future organization and methods of work of CSW.[41] This resolution had not only officially set forth the priority themes to be addressed throughout the CSW's 61st, 62nd, and 63rd sessions, it also explicitly requested for the Commission to deliver recommendations during its 62nd session for priority areas to be considered in the year 2020 "so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls."[42] Finally, ECOSOC called upon CSW to coordinate and deliver thematic reviews during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to determine the progress and achievement of SDGs.[43] At the Forum, which was subsequently held in July 2018, the importance of achieving gender equality through safeguarding the human rights of women and girls, and encouraging the inclusion of women in society to increase sustainable development, was discussed.[44] The importance of gender equality to the realization of all SDGs was also re-emphasized.[45]

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The original mandate of CSW, adopted in 1946, was to provide "recommendations and reports to ECOSOC on promoting women's rights in political, economic, social, and educational fields... [and] urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights."[46] This mandate has been substantially expanded as a follow-up to the UN Decade of Women from 1975 to 1985 and the Third and Fourth World Conferences on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, respectively.[47] As a result of the Fourth World Conference and the adoption of the BPfA, ECOSOC decided that CSW, as its primary responsibility, must take actions to mainstream "a gender perspective in policies and programmes," as well as to assist ECOSOC and Member States in the implementation and achievement of the goals set in

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[33] Ibid
[34] UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 9-11.
[35] UN General Assembly, *Proposed strategic framework for the period 2016-2017: Programme 14, Gender equality and empowerment of women (A/69/6(Prog .14))*, 2014, p. 2.
[36] UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 8-14.
[37] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[38] Ibid., pp. 8-10.
[39] Ibid., p. 9.
[40] UN-Women, *CSW59/Beijing+20 (2015)*, 2015.
[41] UN ECOSOC, *Multi-year programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2016/3)*, 2016.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] PeaceWomen, *Sustainable Development 2018*, 2018.
[45] Ibid.
[46] UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women (Res. 11(II))*, 1946, p. 525.
[47] UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006, pp. 9-15.

the BPfA.[48] This was re-emphasized at the 23rd special session of the General Assembly in 2000, which set the goal of achieving full gender equality.[49]

The main functions and primary responsibilities are outlined in the original mandate of CSW, its expansions, and several ECOSOC resolutions on the methods of work of the Commission.[50] These methods of work have been examined and expanded several times by ECOSOC over the years, most recently in ECOSOC resolutions 2015/6 and 2016/3, in order to ensure coherence with the work of the Council.[51] The aim of these expansions was to set an effective approach to mainstream gender within the entire UN system and engage in discussions with governmental representatives, experts, and non-governmental actors to identify gaps and challenges to gender equality.[52] At its annual meetings, CSW adopts resolutions that are included in an annual report to ECOSOC.[53]

The Commission will continue to meet annually to provide policy guidance to UN Member States and other relevant UN entities in the form of Agreed Conclusions on its priority and review theme and resolutions on emerging issues and trends in gender equality and women's empowerment.[54] CSW continues to organize the Beijing reviews and use the momentum therein to recommit Member States and strengthen their political will.[55] Furthermore, CSW contributes to the annual theme of ECOSOC, strengthening the Council's impact, and works closely with all other gender-specific UN entities, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to enhance their work.[56]

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

In its most recent 62nd session, CSW adopted Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme, *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*.[57] The conclusions expressed the importance of Member States' successful implementation of existing international and regional legal frameworks that concern women's rights, such as the CEDAW, and encouraged collective action.[58] Additionally, the conclusions mention the necessity to incorporate recommendations set forth by the BPfA to accelerate the achievement of the goals outlined within the SDGs.[59] CSW called on Member States to adopt policies that focus on overcoming particular obstacles, such as the economic marginalization of rural women and girls, which have heavily impacted the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development in the global community.[60] Aside from raising global awareness for the importance of the societal inclusion of migrant women, there were also several topics debated and discussed at this session, including the release of women and children hostages in armed conflicts, alleviating the spread of disease among women in rural areas, and the

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[48] UN ECOSOC, *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/RES/1996/6)*, 1996; UN General Assembly, *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/55/71)*, 2000.

[49] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

[50] Ibid.

[51] UN ECOSOC, *Multi-year programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2016/3)*, 2016; UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and Methods of Work of the Commission on the Status of Women (A/RES/2015/6)*, 2015.

[52] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

[53] Ibid.

[54] UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of CSW (E/RES/2015/6)*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., pp. 2-5.

[57] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017; UN CSW, *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (E/CN.6/2018/L.8)*, 2018.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls.[61] In a vote of 30 in favor, four Member States against, and 11 abstentions, the body adopted resolution 6/2018/L.3, entitled "Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women," whereby the body recommended that ECOSOC calls upon Member States to provide required assistance for Palestinian women and girls subjected to constant violations of human rights while living under Israeli occupation.[62] Following CSW 62, the Commission further reaffirmed the necessity to strengthen existing legal and policy frameworks on the inclusion of rural women in order to alleviate the challenges that were identified throughout the session.[63]

CSW 62 also incorporated a review theme, "Participation in 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," from the Agreed Conclusions of the forty-fifth session of the Commission.[64] This session was concluded with a report which revealed the Commission's priority theme for its upcoming sixty-third session in 2019, "social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls," in addition to the review theme, "women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development."[65] A resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the CSW formally declared the Commission's plans to review Member States' implementation of the BPfA at its sixty-fourth session in the year 2020, in order to identify the current obstacles which continue to hinder the achievement of gender equality across the global arena.[66] To prepare for CSW 63, UN-Women held an Expert Group Meeting in September 2018 and published a concept note for achieving the upcoming session's priority theme.[67] The upcoming session to be held will furthermore mark one year prior to the 25-year review of the implementation of the BPfA and three years following the adoption of the SDGs, leaving room for future recommendations to be addressed on the global agenda.[68]

Conclusion

The Commission on the Status of Women has reached major accomplishments in setting global standards, establishing a legally binding framework for gender equality, and promoting women's rights in all spheres.[69] In the past year, the global agenda has demonstrated increased attention on achieving equality for women in labor in addition to how this can address the SDGs, reduce poverty, malnutrition among children, hunger, and maternal health.[70] Education, training programs, and data gathering all demonstrate important tools in preparing women and girls for the changing world of work and is an area the Commission has done a great deal of work in within the last year.[71] With the help of CSOs, expert meetings, and UN-Women reports, CSW can continue to identify prevailing and newly emerging gaps and

[61] UN DPI, *Concluding Sixty-Second Session, Women's Commission Approves Texts on Expediting Gender Equality in Rural Areas, Releasing Female Hostages, Helping Palestinians*, 2018.
[62] Ibid.
[63] UN ECOSOC, *Report of the Commission on the Status of Women: report on the sixty-second session (24 March 2017 and 12-23 March 2018)*, 2018.
[64] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2018.
[65] UN-Women, *CSW63 (2019),* 2018; UN DPI, *Concluding Sixty-Second Session, Women's Commission Approves Texts on Expediting Gender Equality in Rural Areas, Releasing Female Hostages, Helping Palestinians,* 2018.
[66] UN CSW, *Future Organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E.CN.6/2018/L.6), 2018.*
[67] UN-Women, *Expert Group Meeting on 'Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality'*, 2018.
[68] Ibid.
[69] UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2017.
[70] UN DPI, *Economic and Social Council Adopts Texts on Sustainable Development Goals, Women, Non-communicable Diseases, as Coordination, Management Session Commences* (*ECOSOC/6846*), 2017.
[71] Ibid.

challenges to gender equality and address them in an effective manner in their annual meetings to effectively advise ECOSOC to take action accordingly to empower women.[72]

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> *The United Nations Handbook, produced annually by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, offers up-to-date information on membership and Bureau composition of CSW. Furthermore, it clarifies the purpose, evolution, and structure of the Commission in a concise and easily understandable style. It gives reference to the most important ECOSOC and General Assembly resolutions regarding the mandate and structure of the Commission. It is an essential, quick, and easy-to-read summary of what the Commission is, how it functions, and what its mandate is. This is highly valuable for delegates to reference as they think of ways the Commission could potentially react to issues discussed during committee.*

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2018). *Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2017/L.6)* [Resolution]. Retrieved 5 August 2018 from: http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/L.6

> *This resolution, adopted during the CSW's sixty-second session, addresses particular areas of improvement in order to achieve the progressive realization of gender equality across the global arena. This resolution is one of the most recently adopted by CSW and demonstrates its ability to use discussions and turn them into global, concerted, action. Delegates will find this very useful in getting familiarized with CSW's mandate and current points of focus.*

United Nations, Department of Public Information. (2018, March 23). *Concluding Sixty-Second Session, Women's Commission Approves Texts on Expediting Gender Equality in Rural Areas, Releasing Female Hostages, Helping Palestinians (WOM/2145)* [Meetings Coverage]. Retrieved 5 August 2018 from: https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/wom2145.doc.htm

> *This source is a database of UN press releases and meetings coverage. The link contains a detailed summary on the outcome of CSW 62 and the Agreed Conclusions. In particular, the source goes into great detail in terms of Member State collaboration throughout the most recent sessions held by CSW. This will provide excellent guidance for delegates in obtaining a clearer comprehension on CSW's work, as it highlights the Commission's previous and upcoming review and priority themes.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2017). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/3

> *This document contains an official report of the Secretary-General which explicitly demonstrates the importance of empowering rural women and girls in order to achieve gender equality. Since one of the recent priority themes of CSW consist of raising awareness on the inclusion of women and girls in rural areas, this report is a vital tool for delegates to gain insight into the latest themes in focus within CSW, and to gain a much clearer understanding on the committee's goals, moving forward from CSW 62.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *Beijing+20: Recommitting for Women and Girls* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved 27 August 2018 from:

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[72] UN ECOSOC, *Ways and means to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN .6/2014/14)*, 2013.

> *This source is a useful introduction to Beijing+20 and to the implementation of the BPfA. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration comes in a crucial moment for the UN as a whole, being related to several of the SDGs. The Declaration and its implementation are leading the work of CSW through the achievement of the SDGs before the deadline of 2030. This brief overview on Beijing+20 is a useful starting-source for further researches on the issues the Commission is dealing with.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *Commission on the Status of Women* [Website]. Retrieved 27 August 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw

> *This website is an ideal starting point for understanding CSW and serves as the first overview on its foundation, mandate, methods of work, and multi-year programs of work. It is a great source for information on the various priorities and reviews themes the Commission has dealt with in recent years, especially the 61st (2017) and 62nd (2018) sessions. For further research it provides links to the history, official outcome documents, and non-governmental organization participation, as well as the CSW Communications Procedure of the Working Group.*

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United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2018). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (E/CN.6/2018/L.8)* [Agreed Conclusions]. Retrieved 5 August 2018 from: http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8

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United Nations, Department of Public Information. (2017, June 7). *Economic and Social Council Adopts Texts on Sustainable Development Goals, Women, Non-communicable Diseases, as Coordination,*

Management Session Commences (ECOSOC/6846) [Meetings Coverage]. Retrieved 28 August 2018 from: https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ecosoc6846.doc.htm

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I. Promoting Women's Access to Information and Communications Technology

"Each of us have a part to play in closing the gender divide, overturning stereotypes and encouraging women and girls to use ICTs and pursue careers in the technology sector. In doing this, we not only empower women and girls, we move closer to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and a better world for all – including for men and boys, as well as women and girls."[73]

Introduction

The evolution of information sharing has been characterized by a rapid increase in the global demand for information and communications technology (ICTs).[74] Social and economic development across the international community has been facilitated by access to ICTs.[75] ICTs refers to a "set of goods, applications and services used for producing, distributing, processing and transforming information," encompassing telecommunications, computer repair, computer services, and television and radio broadcasting, among others.[76] Promoting gender inclusiveness within societies, specifically with regard to women's access to ICTs, has become a significant issue on the human rights agenda for its contributions to human capital development, economic growth, and sustainable development.[77] Universal access to ICTs requires that all people have material and physical access to information infrastructures and services.[78]

Assessing the role of gender in ICTs accessibility worldwide has been a focus of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in its work on gender mainstreaming in development policy.[79] As the Secretariat of CSW, the United Nations (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) supports women most in need, helps to develop national gender equality policies, and promotes a normative global framework for supporting gender equality.[80] Worldwide, women remain disadvantaged in access to ICTs.[81] Although gender gaps in access to ICTs have narrowed in recent years, only 14% of women in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have access to the internet and women in developing countries have limited access to basic ICTs services and goods, such as mobile phones.[82]

Several factors have contributed to the gender divide in access to ICTs including gender discrimination and stereotypes concerning gender differences at work, remoteness from metropolitan areas, and imbalances within family responsibilities between women and men.[83] Additional barriers to women's access to ICTs include limited access to training, the high costs of internet services and lower income for women in comparison to men, and insufficient policy advocacy.[84] Promoting women's access to ICTs contributes to ensuring quality education, universal literacy, healthcare, and the participation of women in public and political life, enhancing women's ability to overcome some of the traditional challenges of gender inequality.[85]

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[73] Mlambo-Ngcuka, *Reshaping the future: Women, girls and tech for development*, 2018.
[74] ITU, *The Global E-waste Monitor*, 2017.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Marcelle, *Gender, Justice and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)*, 2000.
[77] UN CSW, *Gender, science and technology Report of the expert group meeting*, 2010, pp. 5-8.
[78] ITU, *Elements and principles of the information Society,* p. 5.
[79] UN-Women, *Economic empowerment*.
[80] UN-Women, *Governance and national planning*.
[81] Naudé & Nagler, *Is Technological Innovation Making Society More Unequal?*, 2016.
[82] ITU, *ICTs Facts and Figures 2017*, 2017.
[83] UN ECOSOC, *Engaging Philanthropy to promote gender Equality and women's Empowerment*, 2010.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Dutta et al., *The Global Information Technology Report 2015, Executive Summary*, 2015, pp. 15-18.

International and Regional Framework

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) upholds the right to information and further proclaims that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."[86] The UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* in 1953, reinforcing that the rights of women and men are equal.[87] The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979) encouraged states to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas, including access to information.[88] CEDAW designed a global framework for ensuring women's civil rights as well as their legal status and reproductive rights; it also emphasized specific problems faced by women and girls in rural areas.[89]

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development acknowledged the existence of a gender digital divide.[90] Its findings proved the existence of gender-based barriers toward access to ICTs and confirmed a low participation of women in the information revolution.[91] Ensuring equal access to science and ICTs, improving the image of women in media, and increasing the participation of women in decision making were among the major recommendations of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) (1995).[92] The *Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome,* adopted during the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century," further revealed a number of obstacles to the implementation of the BPfA, such as income inequality, unemployment, and the deepening of poverty levels among women.[93] Moreover, the BPfA determined that young women, women re-entering the labor market, rural women, female migrant workers, and other displaced women, remain the most vulnerable to the lack of access to ICTs.[94] This, in turn, hinders their socioeconomic empowerment.[95]

The *Millennium Declaration* (2000) found universal access to ICTs to be one of the conditions which could help establish a global partnership for development and achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 8.[96] To support the achievement of this goal, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was established in 2001.[97] The first two phases of the summit, conducted in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), established a shared global vision on the evolution of the information society for all.[98] The *WSIS Plan of Action* (2003) underscored the major barriers for women in terms of their access to ICT.[99] This includes barriers to ICTs training and education, limited participation of women in formulating ICTs policies, and a lack of balanced media sources, tools, and gender-focused education programs.[100] At its second phase in

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[86] UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, Art. 19.

[87] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women (A/RES/640 (VII))*, 1953.

[88] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women (A/RES/640 (VII))*, 1953; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979.

[89] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979.

[90] UNESCO, *Gender Issues in the Information Society*, 2003, pp. 11-12.

[91] UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

[92] Ibid.

[93] UN-Women, *Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century,"* 2014, pp. 49-50.

[94] Ibid., pp. 202-268.

[95] Ibid., pp. 202-268.

[96] UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2)*, 2000.

[97] WSIS, *Declaration of Principles (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E)*, 2003.

[98] WSIS, *Final Report of the Tunis Phase of the WSIS (WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/9 (rev. 1)*, 2005, pp. 12-14.

[99] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[100] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

2005, delegates developed a set of criteria for assessment of ICTs for development initiatives and underscored the importance of innovative financing mechanisms.[101]

General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 2015 on "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[102] SDG 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, emphasizing that gender equality may be ensured by widening the access of ICTs to women and girls and supporting their overall development and integration into society.[103] With a similar aim of achieving inclusive growth, SDG 9 promotes infrastructure, industrialization, and innovation as crucial elements for progressing toward positive economic transformations.[104] Additionally, SDG 13 addresses the multiple challenges faced by agricultural workers, which includes women's limited access to relevant technologies, information, and markets.[105]

Women's access to ICTs has received considerable regional attention from several intergovernmental organizations.[106] Having adopted the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, the African Union called for more training of women in science and technology as one means of advancing access.[107] In 2014, the *Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* also underlined multiple actions in the region to narrow the gender digital divide.[108] The Pacific Island states adopted the *Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality,2005 – 2015* (RPPA), which recommends Member States take efforts to increase women's access to technical and vocational education.[109] In the European region, the *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (2012) is a basis for promoting gender equality, including labor opportunities and treatment at work.[110]

Role of the International System

CSW has played a fundamental role in this process since 2003.[111] In its 47th session, CSW considered the issue of women's participation and access to the media and ICTs as a critical instrument for their overall advancement and empowerment.[112] CSW provided recommendations in the fields of education, employment, relevant research, as well as the role of the government, international financial institutions, and civil society to empower women through increasing their access to ICT.[113] The 55th session of CSW held in 2011 specifically focused on encouraging women and girls' access to education and ICT, whereas the Agreed Conclusions focused on strengthening national legislation, gender-sensitive quality education,

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[101] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[102] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES70/1)*, 2015.

[103] UN-Women, *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, 2018, pp. 86-103.

[104] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

[105] Ibid., pp. 119-120.

[106] UN ESCAP, *Report of the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review*, 2014, p.9.

[107] African Union, *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, 2003, pp. 13-17.

[108] UN ESCAP, *Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, 2014, p.11.

[109] Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (RPPA) 2005 – 2015*, pp. 3-4.

[110] Official Journal of the European Union, *The Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, 2012, pp. 53, 115.

[111] UN CSW, *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: 2003 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2003, p. 1.

[112] Ibid., p. 1.

[113] Ibid., p. 1.

science and technology employment of women, and developing ICTs that cater to women's needs.[114] Outcomes of the 61st session of CSW included a set of recommendations on the topic of women's economic empowerment through ICTs.[115] CSW also recognized that new technologies change the structure of labor markets requiring women to develop digital skills as well as technical skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and ICTs.[116] Following global trends, CSW delegates encouraged governments to adopt policies to increase women's participation in emerging ICTs fields as users, leaders, and entrepreneurs.[117]

UN-Women has launched several international initiatives to increase access to ICTs for women.[118] In collaboration with South African institution of higher education, UN-Women developed a Virtual Skills School initiative to develop ICTs for addressing sexual and gender-based violence.[119] UN-Women, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Government of Rwanda jointly produced the Buy from Women Enterprise Platform which encourages Rwandan women to start ICT-related businesses.[120] The platform educates female farmers in Rwanda, providing them with important information such as market prices as well as facilitating investment procedures.[121] The Buy from Women Enterprise Platform is planned to be scaled to other countries and become a global initiative, encouraging female leaders and innovators in business.[122]

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also plays an important role in promoting women's participation in the ICTs sector by implementing its Information for All Programme (IFAP), which was launched in 2000.[123] Within IFAP, UNESCO helps governments to formulate guidelines and actions to create equal conditions for women and men through providing better access to information.[124] Locally, IFAP held the Regional Conference for Francophone Africa on Gender Mainstreaming in ICTs Policies and Programmes, gathering decision-makers from African countries to discuss the application of ICTs in education.[125] UNESCO, UN-Women, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) established the G20 #eSkills4Girls Initiative, which aims to collect research on best practices and policies on gender digital equality, focusing on developing countries.[126]

The Women, ICT, and Development (WICTAD) International Forum recognized in 2013 that promoting women's access to ICTs empowers them to successfully reinvest in their local communities.[127] Currently, the proportion of women employed in the ICTs sector is low, representing less than 1% of total female employment in many economies.[128] The World Economic Forum report further identifies reasons for the need to engage women in the ICTs sector, stating that economic and ICTs competitiveness is closely linked to the development of human capital in compliance with gender non-discriminatory principles.[129]

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[114] UN CSW, *Agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work: 2011 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2011.

[115] Ibid., 2011.

[116] UN-Women, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work: 2017 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2017, p. 14.

[117] Ibid., p. 14.

[118] UN-Women, *UN-Women's innovation and technology projects*.

[119] Ibid.

[120] UN-Women, *Buy from Women*, pp. 2-4.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] UNESCO, *Information for All Educational, Scientific and Programme*, 2017, pp. 1-15.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] eSkills4Girls, 2017.

[127] UN ECOSOC, *Engaging Philanthropy to promote gender Equality and women's Empowerment*, 2010.

[128] UNCTAD, *Global Assessment of Sex-Disaggregated ICTs Employment Statistics*, 2015, p. 27.

[129] Dutta et al., *The Global Information Technology Report 2015, Executive Summary*, 2015, pp. 15-18.

The report also highlights that there remains an increasing demand of ICTs specialists in developed countries, which foresee a shortfall of qualified labor for the new 2 million ICTs jobs globally.[130]

Civil society also has a strong impact in mobilizing public and private sectors to support disadvantaged groups.[131] Women's organizations, business, academia, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute to protecting the rights of women and guide them as essential members of society, which benefit its economic growth.[132] Civil society organizations also encourage women to participate in the social and political sphere of their communities, as well as support women to further shape policies to increase access of women to ICTs.[133] The Technology Initiative of the Global Fund for Women is devoted to increasing digital literacy, combat derogatory imagery of women on the internet, training women in IT, designing extra-curricular classes, and raising the interest of young women in STEM.[134] Some organizations provide assistance to the most vulnerable women, including migrant workers and rural women.[135] The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) developed the *Guide on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies*, which strives to increase the number of female migrant workers in science and technology.[136]

Rural Women and Access to ICT

The empowerment of rural women remains one of the most crucial dimensions in terms of universal digital inclusion.[137] While the economic participation of rural women is essential for sustainable development, the gender divide in access to ICTs is almost two times higher in rural areas than in urban areas.[138] Recognizing the critical situation of women in rural areas, General Assembly resolution 56/129 of 2002 called for Member States to revise their national legislations to guarantee the rights of rural women and hold necessary reforms to provide them with access to appropriate technologies and information as well as to promote the advancement of the economic skills of rural women for their economic empowerment.[139] Empowering rural women through access to ICTs was a priority agenda for the CSW's session in 2018.[140] The 2018 Agreed Conclusions stated that many rural women are discriminated against and lack access to necessary resources and services, including ICT.[141] In addition, CSW underlined the need for sustainable infrastructure in rural areas, safe and secure cyberspaces, and ICT-enabled mobile learning and literacy training.[142]

A UNESCO-led initiative, YouthMobile, coordinates activities among rural youth in 26 Member States.[143] It serves as a platform to train young people on basic professional skills, including coding, as a tool to solve local problems.[144] It helps students to design, promote, and sell mobile applications benefiting to the local societies.[145] In Central Asia, the UNESCO Almaty Office contributed to the implementation YouthMobile in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.[146] As a result of the initiative, local young professionals created

[130] Ibid.
[131] Panth, *What Role Does Civil Society Play in Economic Development*?, 2011.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Collado, *Women's access to ICTs in the information society*, p. 53.
[134] Global Fund for Women, *Technology Initiative*.
[135] Collado, *Women's access to ICTs in the information society*, pp. 52-53.
[136] OSCE, *Guide on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies*, pp. 16-22.
[137] Villa, *Women own less than 20% of the world's land. It's time to give them equal property rights*, 2017.
[138] Ibid.
[139] UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/RES/56/129)*, 2002.
[140] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls: 2018 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2018, p. 5.
[141] Ibid., p. 5.
[142] Ibid., p. 5.
[143] UNESCO, *YouthMobile: Teaching young people to create mobile apps for sustainable development*, 2018, pp. 1-6.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] UNESCO, *UNESCO YouthMoblile Initiative in Central Asia*, 2015, pp. 1-4.

the "Voice of Village" application for 18 community multimedia centers and radio stations, providing access to local government information sources in seven rural districts of Kyrgyzstan.[147] This initiative also provides an essential resource for young women to participate in resolving local issues related to sustainable development, such as youth unemployment.[148]

Bringing the Gender Gap with ICT

A decline in female specialists completing degrees in STEM fields over the past 30 years has resulted in the low representation of women in ICT-related jobs.[149] Civil society experts have argued that stereotypes about women discourage their interest in these fields.[150] Girls are afraid to enter educational programs in STEM because of a common misconception that they do not have the adequate talent or do not belong in STEM and ICTs professions.[151] Gender biases may be passed on to children from an early age.[152]

Additionally, experts have found that job advertisements in STEM fields may deter talented female specialists through gender exclusive language and business practices.[153] Women also consequences of gender bias when applying for promotions in ICT-related positions.[154] One longitudinal study found that men are evaluated according to their potential growth, while women are evaluated based on their existing experience and qualifications.[155] Mothers are especially marginalized, as employers may hold a bias that mothers will not prioritize their work related responsibilities over their family lives.[156] Due to gender bias, traditionally, men occupy management and strategic roles in business, while women play technical roles and receive the lowest paid positions.[157] As such, social and cultural factors can influence employers' perceptions of the same work that can be done by all genders.[158]

UN-Women supports the training and hiring of female ICTs specialists through its Global Innovation Coalition for Change (GICC), having partnerships with the civil society actors in business, academia, and non-profit organizations.[159] Launched by GICC, "4Good Programme South Africa" is a project that aims to develop self-confidence, persistence, professionalism, and communication skills in women entrepreneurs.[160] These qualities further help women to run businesses successfully, make their brands more recognizable, attract investments, and interact with partners.[161] Participants of the program acquire a set of leadership and digital skills allowing them to adopt relevant development strategies, taking into account global and local market trends, as well as successfully overcome gender barriers.[162]

Conclusion

The digital era has brought a new perspective to gender-related issues on the global agenda, resulting in both the emergence of technologies benefiting the sustainable development of societies and also leading to a digital divide.[163] ICTs have entered all areas of our lives, but numerous factors leave women

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Sprague, *Wanted: More women in technology*, 2015.
[150] Gender4STEM, *Gender stereotypes in STEM*.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Merricks, *Women in Tech: Ability vs. Perceptio*n, 2018.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Devillard et al., *Still looking for room at the top: Ten years of research on women in the workplace*, 2018.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Merricks, *Women in Tech: Ability vs. Perception*, 2018.
[158] Mohr, *Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified*, 2014.
[159] UN-Women, *UN-Women Global Innovation Coalition for Change*.
[160] Ibid.
[161] UN-Women, *4Good Programme South Africa*.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Plan International, *Because I am a Girl, the State of the World's Girl s 2010, Digital and Urban Frontiers: Girls in a Changing Landscape*, 2010, pp.100-124.

disadvantaged in gaining access to ICTs, especially in rural areas.[164] Consequently, the gender divide continues to grow.[165] Recent studies focusing on women's access to ICTs emphasize the need to improve women's digital skills, their quality of education and training to ensure employment of female ICTs specialists, as well as creating necessary social infrastructure to address the specific technological needs of women.[166] The empowerment of women is one indicator of sustainable growth and of the development of competitive economies, but it is impossible to achieve this without making ICTs widely available.[167] The digitalization of modern economies also creates a considerable demand for ICTs specialists worldwide, which requires global efforts in the development of human resources.[168] Engaging civil society will remain one of the priorities for CSW in building inclusiveness and promoting women's access to ICTs for sustainable development.[169]

Further Research

Delegates can consider the following questions: What are the major challenges faced by the international community in addressing the problem of women's accessibility to ICT? What are the major results of the Millennium Development Goals implementation regarding gender equality and access of women to ICT? How can collaboration be improved among international stakeholders in light of the 2030 Agenda? How can female entrepreneurship stimulate the advancement of ICTs for development?

Annotated Bibliography

International Telecommunication Union. (2017). *WSIS Stocktaking Process 2017* [Report]. Retrieved 8 August 2018 from: https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-WSIS.SUCC_STORIES-2017-PDF-E.pdf
> *WSIS Stocktaking: Success Stories 2017 is a document containing a considerable variety of examples of national projects aimed to ensure access of women to ICT, case studies, linked to the important international initiatives, such as sustainable development. Delegates may find it useful to study the national policies of their assigned countries in relation to the topic of ICT. The document is divided under substantive sections, like, "E-health" and "Enabling environment," which makes it convenient to search for specific projects.*

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2010). *Gender, science and technology* [Report]. Retrieved 8 August 2018 from: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Women-and-Girls/Documents/ReportsModules/Final-Report-EGM-ST%20Gender%20science%20technology%20expert%20group%20report.pdf
> *The report contains an overview of the latest session of the Commission on the Status of Women, specifically addressing access of women to ICT. It provides results of the research of CSW and other global practices on improving access of women and girls to ICT. Sections A, B and C of this paper will help delegates understand with the overall situation in science and technology education and employment, women's access to, development of, control over, and ability to benefit from technology as well as analysis of women participation in designing innovations in science, knowledge, and technology.*

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2018). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (E/CN.6/2018/3)* [Report]. Retrieved 9 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/3
> *The outcomes of the sixty-second session revealed a number of obstacles toward equal participation of women in various spheres, including science and technology. The report*

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[164] ILO, *Expert group meeting: Gender, science and technology*, 2010.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] UN CSW, *Gender, science and technology Report of the expert group meeting*, 2010.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.

underlines that lack of access to technology, education, investment, etc. remain some of the key challenges to the global community. A thorough analysis of the current systemic challenges outlined in this report will allow delegates to obtain a deeper understanding of the gender equality situation in the world, having a special emphasis on access to technologies.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2003). *Gender Issues in the Information Society* [Report]. Retrieved 8 August 2018 from:
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001329/132967e.pdf
The publication represents an analysis of the historical background of the gender equality mainstreaming, explains reasons for digital divide, and provides characteristics of the Information society, which is one of the key definitions in frames of the agenda item. This paper will be useful in acquiring knowledge on the basic world initiatives and parties, involved into shaping the gender equality agenda. Particularly, Chapter 4 "Bridging the divide: new initiatives, best practices" provides overview of the regional policy frameworks, national and global efforts on increasing access to ICT, helping to study successful cases worldwide.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2018). *YouthMobile: Teaching young people to create mobile apps for sustainable development* [Report]. Retrieved 8 August 2018 from:
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002618/261846E.pdf
This link provides an example of a successful UNESCO initiative implemented in several UN Member States, significantly contributing to the overall situation with human resources development, and particularly, with improving digital skills and knowledge of young women and girls. Aimed to break rooted gender norms, the project includes trainings on breaking stereotypes, helping promote the potential of women in IT-related spheres. By studying this case, delegates may get a general perception of elements needed for a global or regional initiative transforming reality.

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2010). *Engaging Philanthropy to promote gender Equality and women's Empowerment* [Report]. Retrieved 9 July 2018 from:
http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/phlntrpy/docs/philantropyjune5.pdf
The report clarifies the basic topics connected to women's economic empowerment, such as conditions for creating decent jobs, promoting women's leadership in the agriculture sector, as well as ensuring quality education and training. The limited access to basic technologies is recognized as a serious challenge to achieving gender equality. This report will help delegates to study current mechanisms of cooperation aimed to achieve gender equality and understand the role of ICTs in this process.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2017). *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work: 2017 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions* [Report]. Retrieved 8 August 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/61/csw-conclusions-61-web.pdf?la=en&vs=5452
This document lists and summarizes the outcomes of the CSW's Sixty-first session. It explains the topic in depth and provides explicit recommendations in strengthening normative and legal frameworks, education, training and skills development and other spheres. The priority topics of the session included strengthening the role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment, mobility of female workers, managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment, women's collective voice, leadership and decision making. Studying this report will help the delegates to analyze the universal digital inclusion situation in dynamics and outline the remaining challenges to the international framework.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development* [Report]. Retrieved 9 July 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/-

/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?

> *This report provides an overview of the 2030 Agenda implementation process in terms of gender equality. The report also provides recommendations on achieving the key gender-specific SDG indicators based on the statistical analysis. Delegates may find its provisions useful, particularly examining Chapter III, SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 9, which seek to explain links between gender and sustainable development.*

United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.* Retrieved 9 July 2018 from: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

> *This document is one of the foundational for delegates to understand the shared vision of the international community on ensuring gender equality. The framework described in the Beijing Declaration emphasized, among other, access to ICTs as one of the key aspects of women's empowerment, thus, providing with strategic objectives and actions. Delegates are suggested to read provisions of the sections "Women and poverty" and "Education and training of women."*

United Nations, General Assembly, Fifty-sixth session. (2002). *Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/RES/56/129)* [Resolution]. Adopted on the report of the Third Committee (A/56/576). Retrieved 8 August 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/RES/56/129

> *This resolution of the General Assembly os one of the first legal instruments adopted by the UN setting directions for work in terms of increasing access of rural women to ICT. This document significantly considers specific problems faced by the population in these areas. Moreover, it lists the basic measures for improving the situation of women in the rural areas. Delegates may use it as a background for their research on this aspect of the agenda item.*

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II. Advancing Economic Parity for Rural Women

Introduction

Women comprise about half of the world's population, but remain unequally represented in sociocultural, economic, and political realms.[170] Rural women are often the main providers of food and water in their families and communities, although this labor is often unpaid and not factored into calculations of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[171] In developing countries, women account for 43% of the agricultural work force.[172] The most noticeable gaps between rural women and men lie in economic and political sectors, with a 42% disparity rate in economic realms and 77% disparity rate in political contexts.[173] Stagnant economic development and lack of gender equality within rural communities can be linked to shortages of productive resources for women, such as land ownership and inheritance, and a lack of socioeconomic opportunities.[174] These conditions are conducive to sexual exploitation, prohibit women and girls from partaking in employment and education opportunities, and threaten their right to a dignified life.[175]

In March 2018, leaders gathered at the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), CSW 62, to bring attention to the issues which directly constrain rural women from attaining gender parity.[176] Many of the challenges that women in rural environments face stem from persistent historical traditions and unbalanced power structures.[177] The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) defined empowerment as the availability for individuals to attain autonomy and command their livelihoods through "awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality."[178] The international community and Member States should seek to abolish inequitable social norms, question harmful customary traditions, and remove patriarchal structures in order to empower women and girls to self-administer ownership of land tenure and agriculture, engage in education and work opportunities, and participate in local legislation.[179]

International and Regional Framework

The rights of rural women have a large presence in key frameworks.[180] The *International Bill of Rights*, composed of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1966) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESC) (1966), along with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), draw attention to the need for inclusive and non-discriminatory laws irrespective of gender, race, and economic status.[181] The 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) called upon Member States to dismantle operational barriers which frequently disregard rural women from the full enjoyment of their human rights.[182] Such barriers

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[170] World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2017*, 2017, p. 26.

[171] Messac, *Outside the Economy: Women's Work and Feminist Economics in the Construction and Critique of National Income Accounting*, 2018.

[172] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 2.

[173] World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2017*, 2017.

[174] UN ECOSOC, *Statement Submitted by Rural Development Leadership Network, a Non-governmental organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council*, 2017, p. 2.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

[178] UN-Women, *Gender Equality Glossary*.

[179] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016*, 2015, pp. 10-15, 102, 112.

[180] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 2.

[181] UN OHCHR, *Women's Rights are Human Rights*, 2014.

[182] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, p. 3.

include homogenizing women as a collective group with equal needs, disregarding their individual needs in their unique communities, and furthering deep-rooted legislative patriarchal practices.[183] Articles 11 and 12 of CEDAW establish the right for all women to work and receive equal compensation and benefits for their labor, and notes the importance of eliminating barriers to accessing health care services.[184] CEDAW also notes that women omitted from decision making are unjustly limited from economic opportunities, land ownership, and basic services.[185]

In addition, the 1992 *Geneva Declaration on Rural Women*, adopted at the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, recognizes the impact of women's agricultural contribution to progress in developing countries and suggests creating initiatives to promote socioeconomic and political enablement.[186] The Declaration also highlights rural women's potential to make contributions to their nations and the world in economic, legislative and social contexts.[187] Similarly, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) (1995) highlighted the importance of increasing access to essential services and productive resources, and promoting land tenure and food security to achieve gender parity.[188] In 2015, the 20-year review of the BPfA was conducted to discuss enriching the livelihoods of rural women and girls and eliminating poverty.[189]

Additionally, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) highlights the importance of ensuring that legislation promotes equal rights for women and men, irrespective of their religion, social status, and nationality, to access productive resources, decent employment, and education in rural and non-rural areas.[190] Gender parity is directly linked to many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially achieving gender equality (Goal 5), promoting sustainable agriculture (Goal 2), and achieving decent work for all (Goal 8).[191] The 2015 *The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third Conference on Financing for Development* (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) highlighted the need to include women in economic development and leadership to eliminate gender discrimination and violence.[192] The agenda emphasized the urgency to end hunger and malnutrition and suggested investing in strengthening the resilience of rural communities living in poverty and improving food security.[193]

The 2014 *SIDS Accelerated Modalities for Action (SAMOA) Pathway*, an outcome of the 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS Conference), notes the importance of promoting sustainable agricultural practices and increasing the income for rural women and girls through the empowerment of land ownership in small islands and developing states.[194] *Agenda 2063*, a strategic framework produced in 2013 by the African Union, stressed the benefits of empowering rural women in economic and political realms, through promoting and protecting their right to own and inherit land, and administer productive assets and financial services.[195] Similarly, the 2003 *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* designates that Member States should

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid., p. 4.

[185] Ibid., p. 3.

[186] UN General Assembly, *Letter dated 30 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/47/308)*, 1992.

[187] Ibid.

[188] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 2.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid., p. 3.

[191] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 2; UN-Women, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2018). *Infographic: Why Gender Equality Matters to Achieving All 17 SDGs*, 2018.

[192] UN General Assembly, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) (A/RES/69/313)*, 2015, p. 3.

[193] Ibid., p. 7.

[194] UN General Assembly, *SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway*, 2014, p. 16.

[195] African Union, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, 2015, p. 8.

provide access to essential services such as health care facilities, and education programs.[196] The protocol additionally proposes that women in rural areas be given access to financial and credit training to promote their autonomy, encourage gender parity, and improve their quality of life.[197]

Role of the International System

CSW is committed to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women around the world.[198] CSW 62 expressed the importance of achieving gender parity through establishing equal economic opportunities for rural women.[199] In preparation for CSW 62, various forums with multi-stakeholders and expert groups were held, in which the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the World Food Programme (WFP) participated.[200] The topics discussed at CSW 62 included the right of women to decent work and education opportunities, empowering girls and women in rural areas, increasing participation of rural women in leadership and politics, and the need to address unequal power structures to reduce inequalities.[201]

As previously mentioned, various institutions have taken part in the conversation for gender equality, particularly regarding rural women.[202] IFAD is a United Nations (UN) financial institution with the primary goal of investing in the lives of rural communities through empowering individuals to become self-sufficient and take charge their financial independence.[203] In addition, WFP has been responsible for delivering food supplies and disaster relief in emergency situations, and aid to rehabilitate communities.[204] Similarly, FAO is the main UN agency with a strong mandate to defeat hunger; therefore, FAO works closely with rural communities to understand their needs and obstacles to address challenges.[205]

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is the UN agency dedicated to protecting and setting adequate work standards for women and men around the world, and attempts to provide an integrated framework to empower rural women.[206] ILO's 2017 report, *Empowering Women in the Rural Economy*, discerns many of the challenges that women face in rural environments, such as lack of information regarding labor markets and lack of financial services which promote entrepreneurship.[207] According to ILO, these deficiencies are often conceived from gender-based inequalities and predetermined notions of what is "appropriate" for women.[208] Further, the UN Secretary-General issued a report to discuss "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" in September of 2017.[209] The focus of CSW 62 regarded promoting the rights of rural women and girls in land tenure, food sovereignly, and agricultural empowerment.[210] Experts at this meeting highlighted that the main obstacles to promoting economic parity for rural women and girls are the move toward the

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[196] African Union, Pr*otocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, 2003, p. 15.

[197] Ibid.

[198] UN CSW, *About u*s, 2018; UN-Women, *Challenges And Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls*, 2018.

[199] UN-Women, *In Focus: UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)*, 2018; UN ECOSOC, *Report of the Commission on the Status of Women: Report on the sixty-second session (24 March 2017 and 12–23 March 2018) (E/2018/27-E/CN.6/2018/20)*, 2018.

[200] UN CSW, *CSW62 (2018)*, 2018.

[201] UN CSW, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls*, 2018, p. 3.

[202] UN IFAD, *About*, 2018.

[203] UN IFAD, *About*, 2018.

[204] UN WFP, *Overview,* 2018.

[205] UN FAO, *About FAO*, 2018.

[206] ILO, *Empowering Women in the Rural Economy*, 2017, p. 3.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid.

[209] UN-Women, *Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the CSW 62 Priority Theme: Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls*, 2017.

[210] Ibid.

privatization of public goods and the deregulation of corporations and markets.[211] The need for collective cooperation between the private and public sector, international organizations, and civil society to protect human rights and further women's rights was additionally stressed.[212] Youth, policymakers, civil society, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) additionally play a role in the promotion of gender parity for rural women and girls.[213] Their contribution spans from being catalysts for new approaches to development to advancing legislation to promote women's rights.[214]

Protecting Agricultural Independence for Rural Women as a Means to Fight Poverty

Addressing discrimination and inequality in agriculture is a key component to achieve economic parity for rural women.[215] CSW, in partnership with FAO and IFAD, seeks to empower women to claim their right to land ownership, and increase involvement in economic activities and policymaking.[216] Around the globe, a third of employed women work in agriculture.[217] This number varies greatly by region and a country's economic status, however; while women make up only 2.6% of those employed in agriculture in high-income countries, it represents the largest employment sector with for women in low- and middle-income countries.[218] Women in rural areas are commonly subject matter experts on agricultural resource management; this knowledge transfers among generations, preserves their culture, and drives innovation to generate job opportunities in rural communities.[219] The Secretary-General's report 62/190, entitled "Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas," highlighted the importance of agriculture on rural livelihoods and the growing need to provide increasing yields for growing populations.[220] Granting women access to productive resources, such as extension systems and financial aid, would enable them to increase their yields by around 25%, and directly reduce hunger in their communities by around 15%.[221]

Many rural women are subject to financial and social injustices in the rural labor sector.[222] The broad belief that women should behave a certain way and perform definite duties remains a challenge.[223] Developing countries around the world are experiencing the feminization of agriculture as men and boys venture to cities to find jobs.[224] As a result of this, rural women and girls spend their time not only performing household duties, but also underpaid agricultural work.[225] Since rural jobs are often considered informal and therefore inferior, rural women are exploited and perform work for little to no pay.[226] Recognizing the socioeconomic impact derived from the long hours of unpaid labor performed by women would promote the development of gender-inclusive policies that acknowledge the challenges and opportunities of women and men in agriculture, and the benefits that derive from achieving gender

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[211] Ibid.

[212] UN General Assembly, *Violence against Women Migrant Workers (A/RES/62/132)*, 2007, p. 4.

[213] United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

[214] Ibid., p. 24.

[215] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 2

[216] UN CSW, *Rural Women*, 2018.

[217] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 4.

[218] Ibid.

[219] ILO, *Empowering Women in the Rural Economy*, 2017, p. 4.

[220] UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/190)*, 2009, p. 5.

[221] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 2.

[222] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 5.

[223] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 3.

[224] Ibid., p. 2.

[225] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 5.

[226] Ibid.

parity.[227] This would lead to equal pay, equal access to education, and further socioeconomic development in rural communities.[228]

Similarly, the right to own land is crucial to rural livelihoods, as land remains the most important asset.[229] Compared to their male counterparts, only 20% of women in rural areas have access to land ownership.[230] Additionally, only 37% of the 161 countries surveyed have the same right to use and own land as men.[231] Since women in rural areas are rarely land owners, they remain unable to secure credit or capital, which is often contingent on land ownership.[232] Often, women are able to own land only as dependents of a male entity in their families; these secondary rights do not grant women protection in case of divorce or death.[233] In cases where women have the right to land ownership, cultural customs and religious traditions restrain women from the right to use, lease, transfer, rent or inherit the property.[234] Inheritance rights regard men the "head of household," and take women's administrative rights.[235] In addition, when land ownership goes undocumented, it facilitates exploitation and displacement of women.[236] Without transparent and effective land governance, the livelihoods of women in agriculture and food security of their families is endangered.[237] Lack of legal protection and statutory frameworks, coupled with inequitable gender norms, halts economic development and social progress for these women.[238]

Furthermore, to remain competitive and productive in their communities, women in agriculture would benefit from technologies frequently unavailable to them.[239] Ensuring access to credit lines and financial education for rural women could largely impact their livelihoods and communities as it would facilitate their ability to obtain needed machinery, promote sovereignty, and stimulate their financial independence.[240] CEDAW Article 4 outlines the need for governments to take "temporary special measures" to eradicate discrimination for rural women.[241] Some Member States have recognized the importance of providing capital and knowledge resources to women who participate in agriculture.[242] For example, the Forum for the Rights of Women Farmers advocates for rural women in India and brings attention to the conditions they work in.[243] This initiative provides rural women with support from CSOs, encourages legislative reform, and raises awareness on the patriarchal nature of agricultural labor.[244]

Ensuring Access to Essential Services for Rural Women

Rural girls face greater challenges than other children as poverty and illiteracy are more present in their communities.[245] Two-thirds of the 800 million individuals who are currently illiterate are women, and rural

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[227] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 2.
[228] Ibid.
[229] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 7.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid., p. 8.
[232] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 4.
[233] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 8.
[234] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 4.
[235] UN-Women, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*, 2013, p. 4.
[236] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 8.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid., p. 7.
[239] Ibid., p. 6.
[240] Ibid., p. 6.
[241] Ibid., p. 12.
[242] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 7.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Makaam: Forum for Women Farmer's Rights, *About Us*, 2018.
[245] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 14.

women are more vulnerable than urban women.[246] Lack of assets to provide educative services, such as lack of teachers, minimal or no financial support, and inadequate infrastructure are often characteristics of rural communities.[247] Recent studies have shown that an additional year in primary school for girls will increase their wages by over 10-20%, yet many girls are unable to complete primary education as they are often married off.[248] Discriminatory gender practices, insufficient essential resources, and lack of systematic investment from governments limit girls from attending school and obtaining the basic right to education.[249] In addition, rural women and girls do not always receive the same attention as boys and men for school purposes.[250] Families often support boys financially to engage in education, while leaving girls in charge of household work.[251] This impacts not only basic literacy and numeracy abilities, but also undermines self-esteem, and demoralizes their hopes for future opportunities.[252] The wellbeing of a woman directly impacts the health and wellbeing of her children and those in her community.[253] When education barriers are present for women, girls often miss out on the opportunity to participate in proper schooling.[254] As a result, women are less equipped to participate in policymaking within their communities and in furthering economic parity in rural contexts.[255]

Empowering women is largely contingent on the health of women and girls, as healthier women and girls are more able to secure decent job opportunities, obtain better education, and increasingly contribute to their households and communities.[256] The health of women continues to be threatened by natural and artificial disasters, wars and forced displacement, and climate change, especially in rural environments.[257] Inability to access basic health services violates the Article 25 of the UDHR and disproportionately harm women and girls in rural areas.[258] Empowering rural women economically could directly improve child nutrition, and the overall health of communities.[259] The absence of health clinics and maternal care hospitals directly restrain the overall health of rural communities.[260] Rural women are frequently unable to access skilled health personnel; as a result, rural women in developing countries are 38% less likely than urban women to successfully give birth.[261]

Strengthening Legal Frameworks to Promote Inclusivity of Rural Women and Girls

Economic parity is fundamentally shaped and impacted by the institutions, policies, and laws, as well as the constituents who oversee and command those institutions.[262] When women are underrepresented in agricultural, public services, education, and health developments, key decisions disregard their needs and priorities, resulting in the construction of frameworks that underrepresent women.[263] Ensuring that

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[246] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 4.
[247] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 14.
[248] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 3.
[249] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 14.
[250] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 3.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 5.
[257] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 5.
[258] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 9.
[259] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 5.
[260] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 9.
[261] Ibid.
[262] UN CSW, *Empowerment of Rural Women: The Role of Gender-Responsive Governance and Institutions: Report of the Secretary General (E/CN.6/2012/4)*, 2012, p. 2.
[263] Ibid.

women and men are equally represented in legislature and are equally involved in local and national policymaking fundamentally determines the practices and protections that communities have access to.[264] In rural contexts, women often comprise less than 2% of leadership councils, and have less influence on how public funds are spent.[265] This undermines rural women's autonomy and obstructs economic parity.[266] Without social protection, rural women are less able to safeguard their financial security and obtain essential services, such as health care, education, employment, and safety.[267] Promoting gender-neutral legislation, disregarding gender in specific power relations, and encouraging gender mainstreaming, addressing the concerns of men and women in a diverse and holistic manner, would directly reduce discrimination against rural women and contribute to achieving gender parity and a more equitable society.[268]

Conclusion

In order to arrive at gender parity and to promote rural women's right to work, participate in leadership, and obtain essential services, Member States and NGOs should encourage gender-responsive strategies to promote gender mainstreaming around the world.[269] The global community must design gender-equitable agricultural legislature for women to access productive resources, benefit from infrastructure, and enjoy social benefits and economic opportunities.[270] In addition, governments at local and national levels should increase rural women's participation in political affairs to both engage women in policy reform and advance gender parity in rural settings.[271] Sustainable and gender-inclusive policies for agricultural development, including technologies, rural credit, and ensuring food security, are essential for future generations.[272] Introducing gender-receptive legal frameworks and reforming existing discriminatory policies will support the financial and socioeconomic independence of rural women and girls.[273] Women should be able to partake in legislative changes and receive support from civil society, NGOs, and their communities.[274]

Further Research

Keeping in mind the mandate of CSW, delegates should consider questions such as: What are the main conditions for rural women to be equally represented in decision-making bodies? How can governments engage with civil society and other Member States to ensure that the rights of rural women are considered and protected? How can rural women and girls engage in local legislature to amend judicial frameworks and implement gender-inclusive laws and norms? How can partnerships be formed in order to secure the resources needed so women and girls can have education and work opportunities? How can men and boys become involved in local lawmaking to promote the autonomy of women and girls in rural areas? What means can Member States take to challenge established norms and traditions that result destructive to furthering the rights of rural women? Furthermore, what lessons can be applied to further essential services for rural women, particularly to promote health services?

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[264] Ibid.

[265] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012, p. 5.

[266] Ibid.

[267] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 9.

[268] Ibid.

[269] UN FAO, *Rural Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2014, p. 4.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid.

[272] UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/190)*, 2009, p. 5.

[273] UN ECOSOC, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, p. 9.

[274] Ibid.

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> *This ILO report outlines the conditions in which the majority of rural women live, and presents the challenges that they face due to gender discrimination. Women face obstacles such as lack of socioeconomic protection and persistent poverty. Despite this, women are largely responsible for contributing to their families and communities, but are unable to receive recognition and benefits, both financial and social, largely limiting their progress. The report additionally presents initiatives which have been taken to promote rural women's autonomy and economic progress. The guide will prove useful to fully unwind the conditions that nurture such obstacles so delegates construct solutions.*

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2018). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls* [Agreed Conclusions]. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8

> *The document was prepared by CSW on challenges and opportunities to not only achieve gender equality, but also empower rural women and girls. The text acknowledges the importance of upholding regulatory labor laws that allow women and girls to realize their full potential and highlights the effect that achieving gender parity has on creating inclusive societies, achieving sustainable development, and encouraging productive economic growth. In addition, it expands on the importance of including men and boys in the development of gender equality policies. This source will allow delegates to understand the context of the main issues, and explore the challenges and opportunities to achieving gender parity.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2017). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/3

> *This report of the Secretary-General details that measures conducive to gender disparity stem from a lack of inclusive governmental policies and inaction from legislative and judicial institutions. Indicators that measure gender parity and socioeconomic development display the discrepancy between the rights of rural women and men. This document notes that the wellbeing and social inclusion of women and girls in rural areas is directly correlated to the success of many SDGs. The most useful content in the document are the explanations of the challenges which directly halt progress to achieve gender parity. Delegates will find the statistics used in this document to strengthen the argument of the importance of providing women with resources to promote agricultural autonomy.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2017). Statement Submitted by Rural Development Leadership Network, a Non-Governmental Organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/NGO/135

> *This statement was submitted by the Rural Development Leadership Network, an NGO which consults with ECOSOC. This document highlights the social and economic injustices that women face that halt development and restrain their financial independence such as lack of access to infrastructure, transportation, and public services. Furthermore, the document outlines the many challenges posed by lack of economic opportunities and the relationship and interconnectedness among the main restrictions that women endure around the world, especially in rural contexts. The proposals to counteract these gender-sensitive issues will show delegates the main obstacles and guide them towards further research.*

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2018). *Report of the Commission on the Status of Women: Report on the sixty-second session (24 March 2017 and 12–23 March 2018) (E/2018/27-E/CN.6/2018/20).* Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/20

> *This report, the outcome of CSW62, describes the conclusions derived from the meeting, and stresses the importance of strengthening policies to protect human rights, and promote leadership initiatives of rural women and girls. The document highlights the importance of engaging with the ILO to encourage financial autonomy of women and girls, combat historical power relations, and challenge rural injustices such as lack of education, increased marginalization, and persistent poverty. Delegates will be able to holistically evaluate the many facades of the topic in discussion and question norms, research alternatives, and propose innovative solutions.*

United Nations, Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women. (2012). *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals* [Factsheet]. Retrieved 4 August 2018 from: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/ruralwomen/documents/En-Rural-Women-MDGs-web.pdf

> *Though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been succeeded by the SDGs, this factsheet presents multiple indicators that remain accurate and denote progress and setbacks to achieving the MDGs. Driven by a collaboration between the Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, IFAD, and WFP, the information provided compiles the expertise of various subject matter experts. The factsheet will be useful to denote the challenges, such as the absence of health services and, agricultural support, that persist through the provision of statistics.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Thirty-fourth session. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180).* Adopted on the report of the Third Committee (A/34/830). Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/RES/34/180

> *CEDAW highlights the fundamental rights that women have, with Article 14 explaining the specific rights of women in rural contexts. As rural women are unequally represented in decision making at all levels, they experience higher levels of abuse and maltreatment. Not addressing these disparities between women and men proves destructive to Member States, communities and families. Delegates will find detailed accounts of specific issues limiting rural women and will be empowered to address these challenges and collaborate to propose new initiatives for governments to engage in.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Forty-seventh session. (1992). *Letter Dated 30 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General (A/47/308)*. Retrieved 23 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/47/308

> *This document presents an agreement between various heads of state around the world, who recognize the importance and contribution that rural women have on their communities. The Declaration outlines the inherent rights of rural women, such as the right to socioeconomic advancement and financial independence, and proposes objectives for Member States to enact, in order to promote gender. This unique framework additionally provides strategies for delegates to expand upon with their research.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-ninth session. (2014). *SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (A/RES/69/15)* [Resolution]. Retrieved 4 August 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/RES/69/15

> *The* SAMOA Pathway *is an important document which explicitly discusses the conditions and challenges of Small Island Developing States. The document includes the initiatives that Member States should take to improve the livelihoods in rural contexts, including a focus on women empowerment in food production and business ownership. Delegates will find this resolution useful as it discusses unique obstacles regarding improving infrastructure and promoting sustainable practices in rural islandic communities.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1

> *The* 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development *argues that women and girls must contribute to decision making and be equally involved in reforming frameworks and taking action. To achieve economic parity, women and girls must have access to quality education, be engaged in political affairs, and be presented with equal employment opportunities. This document highlights the importance of attaining SDG 5, and draws attention to the impact rural women can have if given the tools and resources to exploit their potential. This resolution will be useful in providing a greater context of the means by which the SDGs can be achieved by 2030 and the role that women and men must partake to truly arrive at gender parity. Delegates will be able to take the ideas presented here and develop solutions to the mentioned trials.*

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III. Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equity

"Women already have what it takes to succeed. Empowerment is about breaking structural barriers."[275]

Introduction

Public services may be defined as commodities and/or services supplied to many or all members of a community for their public interest and wellbeing.[276] Many public services fall under the branch of social protection systems, or policy programs produced, implemented, and maintained by a public institution.[277] Infrastructure can be broken down into two categories, traditional infrastructure, and natural infrastructure.[278] Traditional infrastructure includes artificial structures and facilities such as public transport networks, buildings, water supply and sewage treatment plants, while natural infrastructure references ecosystem-based components as forest landscapes and wetlands and technological devices for watershed protection.[279] Additionally, access refers to the availability, usability, and affordability of the public service or infrastructure system.[280] Inequalities in roles and responsibilities of women and men can lead to stark disparities in their access to and use of infrastructure networks and public services.[281]

The provision of these type of services is necessary to coordinate, support, or directly provide for the needs of everyone.[282] If the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their accompanying targets and indicators are to be fully achieved, this will likely require the provision of gender-inclusive public services and a foundation of sustainable infrastructure that takes gender-specific needs into account from the design and planning process through future implementation and maintenance phases.[283] Poor infrastructure in sectors such as energy, water and sanitation, transport, housing, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) may otherwise worsen the inequality between men and women.[284] Infrastructure will provide the basic foundations for accessing public services, and may enable women to conduct more market activity, access new markets, and pursue new formal and informal job opportunities.[285]

To highlight the importance of this topic to the wider United Nations (UN) System, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) decided that Member States should consider "Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls" as the priority theme of the 63rd Session of the CSW in 2019.[286] In this session, CSW will convene to build on expert opinions and develop a report that contains recommendations and guidelines to improve women's access to public services and strengthen infrastructure networks, drawing from studies on key cultural, familial, financial, and security barriers to equal access as well as analyses of potential needs for public sector reform in both service provision and infrastructure planning and development.[287]

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[275] UN DPI, *Secretary-General António Guterres' Remarks at the Commission on the Status of Women on 13 March 2017*, 2017.
[276] Merriam-Webster, *Definition: Public Service*, 2018.
[277] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality*, 2018.
[278] Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, *The Sustainable Infrastructure Imperative*, 2017.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Gaynor et al., *Annex on Gender and Infrastructure*, 2004.
[281] Sen, *From Principle to Practice: Universal and Gender-Responsive Health Care,* 2018.
[282] UNDP, *SDG Implementation Framework: Effective Public Service for SDG Implementation*, 2016.
[283] UNDP, *SDG Implementation Framework: Effective Public Service for SDG Implementation*, 2016; Caiser, *Why Infrastructure is Key to the Success of the SDGs*, 2015.
[284] UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2016, Chapter 2: The Infrastructure – Inequality – Resilience Nexus*, 2016.
[285] UN HLPF on Sustainable Development, *2017 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*, 2017.
[286] UN ECOSOC, *Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2016/3)*, 2016.
[287] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality*, 2018.

International and Regional Framework

In 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) established that all persons have basic human rights, including the rights to necessary social services, medical care, and social security (Article 25), as well as education (Article 26) and other fundamental rights.[288] As recommended by CSW, the use of universal and gender-neutral language in this foundational document aimed at symbolizing that all humans would have access to these rights.[289] The principles of "dignity and worth of the human person" and "equal rights for men and women," enshrined within the preamble of the UDHR, further served as a foundation to base gender mainstreaming in other important UN documents and initiatives, which is one of the key functions within the mandate of CSW.[290]

In the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), adopted in 1966, the General Assembly specified a set of rights that State Parties must respect, protect, and fulfill without discrimination on the basis of sex.[291] The international community can improve upon or maintain these rights by building infrastructure and public service delivery systems that directly aim to support human rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living, "including adequate food, clothing and housing" (Article 11), "the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (Article 12), and the right to education (Article 13).[292] The General Assembly additionally recognized in General Assembly resolution 64/292 of 2010, "The Human Right to Water and Sanitation", that safe and clean drinking water and sanitation systems are essential human rights, and the infrastructure systems that allow for the provision of these rights make possible the enjoyment of all other human rights.[293]

The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) (1995) recognizes the importance of social protection, public services and infrastructure and situates the topic of gender-equitable infrastructure within a broader intersectional discourse that determines actionable steps to reach poverty eradication and socioeconomic advancement for women and girls.[294] Under the critical area of concern A (women and poverty), Member States commit to create gender-equitable social security systems in the spaces and areas in which such protections do not exist and commit to modify existing systems to ensure women and men are treated equally.[295] The critical role of infrastructure was recognized under area F (women and the economy) where Member States were called upon to ensure equal market access among entrepreneurs of all genders when providing public infrastructure systems, as well as under area K (women and the environment), where Member States were called to give equal access to women in plans for the development of infrastructure, particularly using sustainable technologies.[296]

Furthermore, women's civil society organizations (CSOs) came together to emphasize the crucial role of women's participation in all dimensions of sustainable development at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).[297] The outcome document of Rio+20, titled *The World We Want*, contains explicit references to accessing social services for gender parity, and encourages advocacy campaigns and outreach initiatives that aim to enhance social protection for all people regardless of gender.[298] The Association for Women's Rights in Development cites the international recognition of civil society voices on these topics at Rio+20 as a significant step forward for inclusive

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[288] UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

[289] UN Global Issues, Gender Equality, 2018.

[290] UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, Preamble; UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*.

[291] UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

[292] Ibid.

[293] UN General Assembly, *The Human Right to Water and Sanitation (A/RES/64/292)*, 2010.

[294] UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Ibid.

[297] Association for Women's Rights in Development*, Rio+20 Outcomes: What Was Agreed and What This Means for Women's Rights Going forward*, 2013.

[298] Ibid.

development and efforts to reduce the gender gap that exists between men's and women's access to decision-making processes, including those decisions that determine infrastructure and public service planning and development.[299] The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third Conference on Financing for Development* (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) provides a model of incorporating gender mainstreaming into international development policy to ensure all voices are heard in the design and planning of public systems.[300] It suggests conducting targeted actions to bring both men and women into all steps of financial, economic, environmental and social policy creation and implementation, starting with supporting the realization of women's full and equal rights, increasing women's political participation and economic leadership, and eliminating gender-based violence.[301]

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) underscores the interconnectedness and indivisibility of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and provides a broad roadmap to eliminate poverty and reach equal access of the benefits of such development.[302] Target 5.4 of SDG 5 directly relates to public services and infrastructure for gender equality, as it aims to give recognition to unpaid care and domestic work that is often disproportionately conducted at a much greater rate by women than men.[303] To do this, the target proposes providing public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies in addition to advocating for shared responsibility within the household and the family unit when appropriate.[304] SDG 9 further endorses gender comprehensive innovation of frameworks,, and directly calls for increased investments in gender-inclusive infrastructure.[305] The 2017 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development further focused on the thematic review of targets to reach SDG 9, and encouraged governments to ensure infrastructure investments taking into account gender-specific constraints and opportunities in roles such as entrepreneurs, farmers, domestic workers for both men and women.[306]

Role of the International System

UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2016/3 (2016) on a "Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission on the Status of Women"*,* lays out the focused and thematic approach the CSW intends to follow during each of its sessions throughout 2017-2019.[307] The selection of these topics displays the consensus of Member States' contribution to improving the issue of unequal access to public services and the interlinked problems that arise from neglecting women's perspectives in infrastructure development. [308]

The topic of access to public services and sustainable infrastructure has also been considered by the CSW under past priority themes.[309] The 53rd annual session of the CSW in 2009 established a link between unpaid care work and unequal access to public services, and called for the development of

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[299] Ibid.
[300] UN General Assembly, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) (A/RES/69/313)*, 2015.
[301] Ibid.
[302] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality*, 2018.
[303] UN General Assembly, *Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/71/313)*, 2017.
[304] Ibid.
[305] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.
[306] UN HLPF on Sustainable Development, *2017 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*, 2017.
[307] UN ECOSOC, *Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2016/3)*, 2016.
[308] UN ECOSOC, *Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2016/3)*, 2016.
[309] UN CSW, *The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities Between Women and Men, Including Caregiving in the Context of HIV/AIDS*, 2009; UN CSW, *Many Women for Cultural Reasons Sidelined from Systems Set Up to Help Them, Commission Told*, 2014; UN CSW, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work: 2017 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions,* 2017.

adequate social protection systems, including investments in quality, accessible and affordable public services and enhanced access to infrastructure to reduce the burden of care.[310] At the 58th session of the CSW in 2014, speakers from 24 CSOs advocated for women who are frequently excluded from accessing public services due to cultural barriers, by calling on governments to reform laws and policies that reinforce discriminatory patterns.[311] In recent years, the 61st session of the CSW addressed the globally unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work conducted by women, and reported the need to reduce and redistribute this trend.[312] This session's outcome documents explicitly called for improvement of the provision of public services that could lessen these constraints, such as water and sanitation, transport networks, and information and communications technology (ICTs), as well as accessible, affordable and good quality childcare and care facilities."[313]

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 69/327, "Promoting Inclusive and Accountable Public Services for Sustainable Development", which highlights the growing need to strengthen public administration in support of sustainable development practices that are inclusive of all genders.[314] It encourages the international community to promote the exchange of information, experiences, lessons learned, and best practices to improve upon public institutions and public services.[315] It stresses the need for further accountability, transparency, and gender equity in public institutions, the creation of appropriate institutional frameworks, and professional and ethical leadership, as fundamental for the efficiency and effectiveness of sustainable development.[316]

Each year, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) organizes the United Nations Public Service Forum.[317] The Forum aims to promote enhanced cooperation and partnerships, and highlights the pivotal role that public services play in the implementation of the SDGs.[318] The Forum draws from the strategies that different countries are implementing and their related successes and difficulties in issues such as gender mainstreaming and improving infrastructure foundations for public service provision.[319] It culminates in the United Nations Public Service Awards, where levels of development are taken into account throughout this Forum, and the awards given reflect the scalable universality of the SDGs.[320]

Through its country-specific programming, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), advocates for the decentralization of public resources and services from the national level to the local level, and for the expansion of capacity-building measures.[321] The organization brings a long history of experience in over 60 countries to guide national development planning and continues to work directly with and alongside country partners to operationalize plans which fully incorporate women's needs into policy efforts.[322] UN-Women engages directly with national ministries to mitigate disconnects regarding gender empowerment and national development strategies, cultivates the capacities of government officials to implement gender equality measures, and create

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[310] UN CSW, *The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities Between Women and Men, Including Caregiving in the Context of HIV/AIDS*, 2009.

[311] UN CSW, *Many Women for Cultural Reasons Sidelined from Systems Set Up to Help Them, Commission Told*, 2014.

[312] UN CSW, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work: 2017 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2017.

[313] Ibid.

[314] UN General Assembly, *Promoting Inclusive and Accountable Public Services for Sustainable Development (A/RES/69/327)*, 2015.

[315] Ibid.

[316] UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012.

[317] UN DPI, *UN Public Service Day & Awards*, 2018.

[318] UN DPI, *UN Public Service Awards Recognizes Initiatives in 8 Countries that are Advancing Sustainable Development Goals*, 2018.

[319] UN DPI, *UN Public Service Day & Awards*, 2018.

[320] UN DPI, *United Nations Public Service Awards: Submission Rules for Nominations*, 2018.

[321] UN-Women, *Engaging in Public Sector Reform*.

[322] UN-Women, *Inclusive National Planning*.

monitoring and evaluation frameworks for accountability and oversight.[323] In the same regard, the World Bank recently began implementing measures in infrastructure development projects that aim to comprehensively consider the needs of women, particularly in developing countries.[324] These may include practices to prevent violence against women in transport systems, and financing communication campaigns around development projects that seek to change social norms and raise awareness of common instances of gender-based violence that could occur around their infrastructure networks.[325]

Regional bodies have also contributed to shaping norms and best practices for public service provision that take into account gender equity in access to public services and sustainable infrastructure development projects.[326] The African Union, for example, adopted the *African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration* (2011), which considers gender equality as a key component of both public service provision and administration of such services.[327] It further sets guidelines to encourage all States parties to forbid all forms of discrimination on any basis, including gender, throughout both the design and service provision processes of public service administration.[328] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) are working to advocate for pre-implementation environmental assessments that include a focus on gender disparities, and consider ways to strengthen the capacity of governance systems to alleviate gender-related health risks that could come with infrastructure project implementation.[329] Synthesizing these efforts will require inclusive approaches to innovation, such as the European Commission definition of "Responsible Research and Innovation", "an approach that anticipates and assesses potential implications and societal expectations with the aim to foster the design of inclusive and sustainable research and innovation."[330]

Challenges for Women in Accessing Public Services

Due to social and cultural norms that still persist in many societies, women are often given the primary responsibility of household and childcare duties disproportionately than their male counterparts.[331] Women are more likely to be culturally expected to work longer hours at home for their caring roles, while men may be more often expected to act as primary income providers and spend more time engaging in public life.[332] Both a lack of free time and inability to leave home-based duties may impact women's ability to access public services outside of their house, especially when expected to be the sole providers of care to family members.[333] Improving the quality and availability of publicly provided childcare services could give more female caretakers the ability to access other public services, especially in developing countries.[334]

Women's economic security is often adversely impacted by a lack of secure access to public services such as healthcare, education, and public transport.[335] For example, women who use public transportation networks often fear violent street crime and abuse on their commutes to access these

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[323] UN-Women, *Gender Equality: A Governance Matter*, 2013.
[324] World Bank, *Preventing Violence Against Women in Public Transport Systems.* 2016.
[325] Ibid.
[326] ASEAN, *Third Report on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN: Gender Dimensions of Globalization and Regional Integration*, 2007.
[327] African Union, *African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration*, 2011.
[328] Ibid.
[329] UNDP, *Africa's Infrastructure Drive Must Take Into Account Health and Gender to be Sustainable*, 2015.
[330] European Commission, *Responsible Research and Innovation*, 2018.
[331] World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law: Getting to Equal*, 2016.
[332] ASEAN, *Third Report on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN: Gender Dimensions of Globalization and Regional Integration*, 2007.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Mlambo-Ngucka, *How Improving Childcare Brings Benefits for Everyone*, 2017.
[335] Malik et al., *Women in Pakistan's Urban Informal Economy: Vulnerabilities, Opportunities and Policy Solutions*, 2016.

networks, thus limiting women's willingness to travel.[336] This barrier to mobility hinders women's ability to access jobs outside of domestic work.[337] According to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), 52.6 million women across the world were employed as domestic workers in 2010.[338] Work in this informal economy may increase women's overall labor force participation, but these spaces lack laws and public policies that protect workers from instances of unjust payment or other abuse.[339] Additionally, conducting domestic work without pay may limit the amount of income from other livelihood activities that may be received by and available to women.[340]

Improving Access Through Sustainable Infrastructure Development

Poor quality, design, and distribution of infrastructure systems may play a detrimental effect on women's access to basic services.[341] The consequences of poor infrastructure systems often fall on the shoulders of women and young girls, as they often travel long distances for the purpose of hauling water and fuel, risking violence or injuries from a lack of sanitation services, cleaning smoke-filled cookstoves, and taking primary responsibility for household maintenance.[342] Infrastructure systems can be designed to prevent common access barriers, such as fear of an unsafe route or otherwise unreliable transport network.[343] About 51% of women around the world are excluded from the benefits of connectivity, especially connectivity infrastructure, such as ICTs networks and road transportation systems.[344] These networks could directly support women's access to public services of education and health networks. [345]

At the community level, some effective participation strategies have been developed to involve women in the planning and designing of water, sanitation and irrigation systems.[346] Project implementation can use women's contributions in a number of ways, including construction and maintenance work, advisory and managerial services, political or community decision-making, or other roles beyond being passive users and beneficiaries of the infrastructures systems.[347] It will be important to enable women's full participation in the construction, implementation and operational phases of projects at national levels of planning as well, to ensure that gender-inclusive perspectives are fully and actively considered across major development plans.[348]

Public Sector Reform

Public institutions can be seen as service providers when it comes to the provision of services such as public education, healthcare, and water and sanitation.[349] Gender mainstreaming remains a vital component of policy development, as it can help prevent further barriers to gender parity among resources provided by public institutions.[350] Increasing transparency and accountability in the public sector is also imperative to ensure equal access to public services, as governments may often misappropriate necessary funds that could otherwise be used to make such policies and infrastructure

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[336] World Bank, *Preventing Violence against Women in Transport Systems*, 2016.
[337] Malik, *Without Improved Public Service Delivery, Women in Developing Countries Can't Take Advantage of Economic Opportunity*, 2016.
[338] Hisam, *Hidden Workers*, 2016.
[339] Malik, *Without Improved Public Service Delivery, Women in Developing Countries Can't Take Advantage of Economic Opportunity*, 2016.
[340] Hisam, *Hidden Workers*, 2016.
[341] UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2016, Chapter 2: The Infrastructure – Inequality – Resilience Nexus*, 2016.
[342] World Bank, *Making Infrastructure Work for Women and Men*, 2010.
[343] Ibid.
[344] International Telecommunication Union, *ICTs Facts and Figures*, 2017.
[345] UN ESCAP, *Women's Exclusion from Connectivity Architectures*, 2018.
[346] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Why Gender Matters in Infrastructure*, 2004.
[347] African Development Bank Group, *Checklist for Gender Mainstreaming in the Infrastructure Sector*, 2009.
[348] Ibid.
[349] UN Women, *Engaging in Public Sector Reform*.
[350] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality'*, 2018.

systems inclusive to all.[351] Gender-inclusive design of infrastructure and gender-responsive public service delivery will ultimately support the goal of gender parity in access to public services, but the quality of the services being provided must also be taken into consideration.[352] The gender dimensions of service quality are apparent both in physical infrastructure, such as the availability of safe sanitation facilities in schools and public spaces, and in interaction with service providers.[353] Poor quality of services can of itself become a barrier to women's access of such services.[354]

In this context, UN-Women points out that discriminatory practices regarding the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls has been documented in both public and private healthcare institutions.[355] These instances could range from denial of services to coerced medical procedures, such as forced sterilizations, and obstetric violence (such as bullying and coercion of pregnant women during childbirth).[356] Lack of accountability within systems for public service provisions may exacerbate and extend such unethical trends.[357] These may also come as a result of corruption, which has been shown to cause disproportionate levels of suffering among women as compared to men.[358] Corruption in public service provision and infrastructure development on a national level may stem from unequal power relations between men and women, and long cycles of exclusion dating back generations.[359] It is crucial to identify and improve upon institutional biases in public service quality and adequacy of sustainable infrastructure development to promote access to public services and sustainable infrastructure.[360]

Conclusion

In order to make public service provision and infrastructure development gender-responsive, it is crucial to comprehensively assess and address the underlying causes of women's vulnerability and exclusion in their diverse contexts around the world.[361] Investments in sustainable infrastructure are essential for redistributing culturally ascribed allotments of domestic work among women and men, and reducing other key drivers of women's income insecurity, such as financial and personal security barriers.[362] Access to public services and sustainable infrastructure development are vastly interconnected, and positive results from discussions on these topics could lessen the challenging effects of cultural and financial barriers that impact women disproportionately to men.[363] Further success could stem from undergoing transparent reforms in public sectors which include gender perspectives in public service provision, mitigate corruptive forces which often skew a gender power imbalance, and ensure gendered design dimensions in plans for infrastructure development.[364]

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[351] Chene et al., *Corruption and Gender in Public Service Delivery: The Unequal Impacts*, 2010.

[352] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality'*, 2018.

[353] ASEAN, *Third Report on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN: Gender Dimensions of Globalization and Regional Integration*, 2007.

[354] Wahlbeck et al., *Quality in and Equality of Access to Healthcare Services*, 2008.

[355] UN-Women, *Gender Equality: A Governance Matter*, 2013.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Chene et al., *Corruption and Gender in Public Service Delivery: The Unequal Impacts*, 2010.

[358] Fuentes, *The Link Between Corruption and Gender Equality: A Heavy Burden for Development and Democracy*, 2018.

[359] Ibid.

[360] UN General Assembly, *Promoting Inclusive and Accountable Public Services for Sustainable Development (A/RES/69/327)*, 2015.

[361] UN-Women, *Gender Equality: A Governance Matter*, 2013.

[362] World Bank, *Making Infrastructure Work for Women and Men*, 2010.

[363] UN CSW, *Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality'*, 2018.

[364] Chene et al., *Corruption and Gender in Service Delivery: The Unequal Impacts*, 2010.

Further Research

Delegates should consider the following questions in their research: How can increasing access to public services impact the post-2015 development agenda? What are some principles for gender-responsive design, financing and implementation that cut across policy areas (public services, sustainable infrastructure, and governance reform) and sectors (education, health, child and elder care, transport, energy, water, and sanitation)? What are the best ways to increase access to public services for women on all levels of policy implementation? How can sustainable infrastructure development be used as a tool to increase women's access to public services, particularly in the rural context? How can gender-responsive public services be financed, despite fiscal pressures? What kind of investments are needed to make public service sectors such as water, sanitation, and transport systems both more environmentally sustainable and more gender-responsive?

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> *This report provides a regional context to several of the key components of this topic. The second subtopic of this report will be helpful to get a good understanding of situational challenges of women who do conduct a wide range of economic activities in and out of their home. Delegates will especially benefit from the third section, which brings together both cultural and familial as well as financial access barriers to public services for women domestic workers and details proposed indicators for their economic integration.*

Caiser, L. (2015, September 9). Why Infrastructure is Key to the Success of the SDGs. *International Institute for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 9 July 2018 from: https://www.iisd.org/blog/why-infrastructure-key-success-sdgs
> *This report was published ahead of the launch of the SDGs in 2015, and gives further insight into the importance of infrastructure development to the success of the SDGs. The author provides key facts surrounding the current state of infrastructure development processes and the constraints faced by both governments and those who desire to use the infrastructure systems. It is a helpful resource to better understand the innovative concept of public procurement of sustainable infrastructure development and the potential for public-private partnerships to impact public service delivery along these infrastructure systems.*

Chene, M, et al. (2010). Corruption and Gender in Public Service Delivery. Retrieved 20 October from: http://gsdrc.org/document-library/corruption-and-gender-in-service-delivery-the-unequal-impacts/
> *This white paper gives an analytical overview on the ways that corruption can reinforce systematic discrimination against women, in particular with regards to unequal access to public service delivery. It highlights the importance of several public services as they relate to the context of being a woman in various cultures, such as the role of women as primary users of education and healthcare systems due to culturally significant primary caretaker roles. It will be helpful for delegates to add further context to the argument that gender mainstreaming across good governance and anti-corruption policy can help ensure women are well represented at all levels.*

Chopra, D. (2018). *Initiating Women's Empowerment; Achieving Gender Equality: Interlinkages Amongst Social Protection, Infrastructure and Public Services*. Retrieved 14 September 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/63/egm/chopra%20dbackground%20paperdraftegmspsbp1.pdf?la=en&vs=4058

This background paper gives a thorough insight into the interweaving linkages between public services, sustainable infrastructure, and social protection, showing why they are three focus areas that must be worked on together in order to achieve gender equality. It also showcases the multi-faceted roles of women in several specific familial and working contexts and will be particularly helpful for delegates to see how the outlined key changes might be able to impact gender power balances within larger social and economic structures. The core of this paper provides analysis for eight case studies of programs and policies pertaining directly to successes and weaknesses in previous attempts to include women's interests, needs, and priorities in public service provision.

Gaynor, C. & M. Jennings. (2004). *Annex on Gender and Infrastructure.* Retrieved 11 September 2018 from: https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/docs/research/WEJR7/Guest_-_PPPI_Gender_Annex.pdf
> *This annex accompanied a larger paper published by the World Bank Institute in 2004 on Gender, Poverty and Public-Private Partnerships in Infrastructure. It summarizes the key messages of this paper and provides essential background on key issues around gender mainstreaming in public infrastructure development. Delegates will find the authors' illustrations of gender issues in several sectors of infrastructure development and public service provision, including water, sanitation, transportation, and energy especially helpful.*

Sen, G. (2018). *From Principle to Practice: Universal and Gender-Responsive Health Care.* Retrieved 14 September 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/63/egm/sen%20gbackground%20paperdraftegmspsbp2.pdf?la=en&vs=3958
> *This paper was presented at the September 2018 Expert Group Meeting ahead of the 63rd session of CSW. It provided an overview of the state of the Health Care side of the public services conversation, and gives a detailed look at social protection (through definitions, case studies, and theoretical discourse). It will be helpful for delegates to understand the different policy approaches under consideration for implementation of gender-responsive health care policies, such as the creation of a Social Protection Floor or Universal Health Coverage System.*

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2018). Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting on 'Social Protection Systems, Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality'. *Retrieved 8 August 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw63-2019/preparations/expert-group-meeting*
> *This concept note served to understand the impact of CSW in supporting the issue of Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality. It provides a review of key focus areas and gives good insight into the mandate of CSW, especially by means of giving delegates further guiding questions that the Expert Group is meant to research for the upcoming session of CSW as well. It will be a useful resource for delegates to read, absorb, and understand how the participants of CSW 63 are framing their thinking on the issues in this topic.*

United Nations Development Programme. (2016). *SDG Implementation Framework: Effective Public Service for SDG Implementation* [Report]. Retrieved 9 July 2018 from: http://localizingthesdgs.org/library/136/Effective-public-service-for-SDG-implementation-SDG-Implementation-Framework-Note-1.pdf
> *This report, created by UNDP, ties together public service provision and accessibility with each of the SDGs. It will help delegates understand the components of sustainable development implementation that public service providers will keep in mind to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. It also delineates several challenges to overcome in order for the SDG targets to be achieved and outlines areas in particular where public services must be improved, such as data, capacity-building, adaptation, and localization. The final annex will be a useful visual as it includes a table of SDGs and SDG targets linked to various Public Service Challenges.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2013). Gender Equality: A Governance Matter [Report]. Retrieved 11 September 2018 from: *http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20womenlggovernancebriefu sweb%20pdf.pdf?la=en*

> *This brief from UN-Women gives a quick but thorough overview of UN-Women's involvement in helping to shape gender-inclusive policies at the national level. This is one of the major methods of taking action to improve women's access to public services and ensure women are involved and considered in sustainable development of infrastructure. This will be useful to give an understanding of the entry points where gender mainstreaming is being put into policy formulation.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-ninth session. (2015). *Promoting Inclusive and Accountable Public Services for Sustainable Development (A/RES/69/327)* [Resolution]. Retrieved 7 August 2018 from: http://undocs.org/A/RES/69/327

> *This resolution provides an example of the international-level actions that have recently been taken on this topic. The resolution focuses specifically on the issue of inclusivity in developing public services. In this respect, it pays close attention to corruption, an issue that frequently impacts policy effectiveness and quality of public services. This will also be useful for delegates to see calls for measures to increase accountability of public service providers.*

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Chopra, D. (2018). *Initiating Women's Empowerment; Achieving Gender Equality: Interlinkages Amongst Social Protection, Infrastructure and Public Services*. Retrieved 14 September 2018 from: http://www.unwomen.org/-

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Gaynor, C. & M. Jennings. (2004). *Annex on Gender and Infrastructure.* Retrieved 11 September 2018 from: https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/docs/research/WEJR7/Guest_-_PPPI_Gender_Annex.pdf

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