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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

BACKGROUND GUIDE 2016

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS





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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2016 National Model United Nations Conference in New York (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year's staff is: Directors Marleen Schreier (Conference A) and Ariane Larouche (Conference B), and Assistant Directors Tyler Goudal (Conference A) and Andrea Jacoby (Conference B). Marleen holds a B.A. in Political Science and Communications from the University of Erfurt, and is enrolled in the Master of Public Policy program of the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, Germany. She works as a research fellow at the UN System Staff College in Turin, Italy, and this is her second year on NMUN•NY staff. Ariane completed her B.A. in Public Affairs and International Relations in 2013 at Université Laval in Quebec City, Canada. She is currently enrolled in a Master's degree program in Political Science, with a major in International Relations, at the University of Ottawa, Canada, and this is her third year on staff. Tyler is in a Bachelor's degree program in international studies and political science at Simon Fraser University, Canada. He is looking forward to his second year on staff. Andrea graduated with a B.A. in Political Science from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. She currently lives in Medford, Oregon, and works at a vineyard, and is excited for her second year on staff.

The topics under discussion for CSW are:

- I. The Impact of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence on Reproductive Health
- II. Furthering Women's Participation in and Access to Information and Communication Technologies
- III. Women's Empowerment and the Link to Sustainable Development

The Commission on the Status of Women is an important organization within the UN system, as the main entity dedicated to gender equality and women empowerment. CSW plays a crucial role in promoting women's and girls' rights, implementing global standards for gender equality, and providing information on the status of women throughout the world. In order to accurately simulate the committee, it will be critical for delegates to understand that CSW reports the outcomes and recommendations following its annual session to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and its work is supported by UN-Women.

This Background Guide constitutes a good introduction to these topics, in order to familiarize yourself with the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We highly encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in-depth, as well as 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](#). Please take note of the [NMUN policies](#) on the website and in the [Delegate Preparation Guide](#) regarding plagiarism, codes of conduct, dress code, sexual harassment, and the awards philosophy and evaluation method. Adherence to these guidelines is mandatory.

The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) are available to download from the NMUN website. This document includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure. It is thus an essential instrument in preparing for the conference, and a reference during committee.

If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, feel free to contact the Under-Secretaries-General for the ECOSOC Department, Dinah Douglas (Conference A) and Lauren Shaw (Conference B). You can reach either USG by contacting them at: usg.ecosoc@nmun.org.

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

Sincerely,

Conference A

Marleen Schreier, *Director*
Tyler Goudal, *Assistant Director*

Conference B

Ariane Larouche, *Director*
Andrea Jacoby, *Assistant Director*

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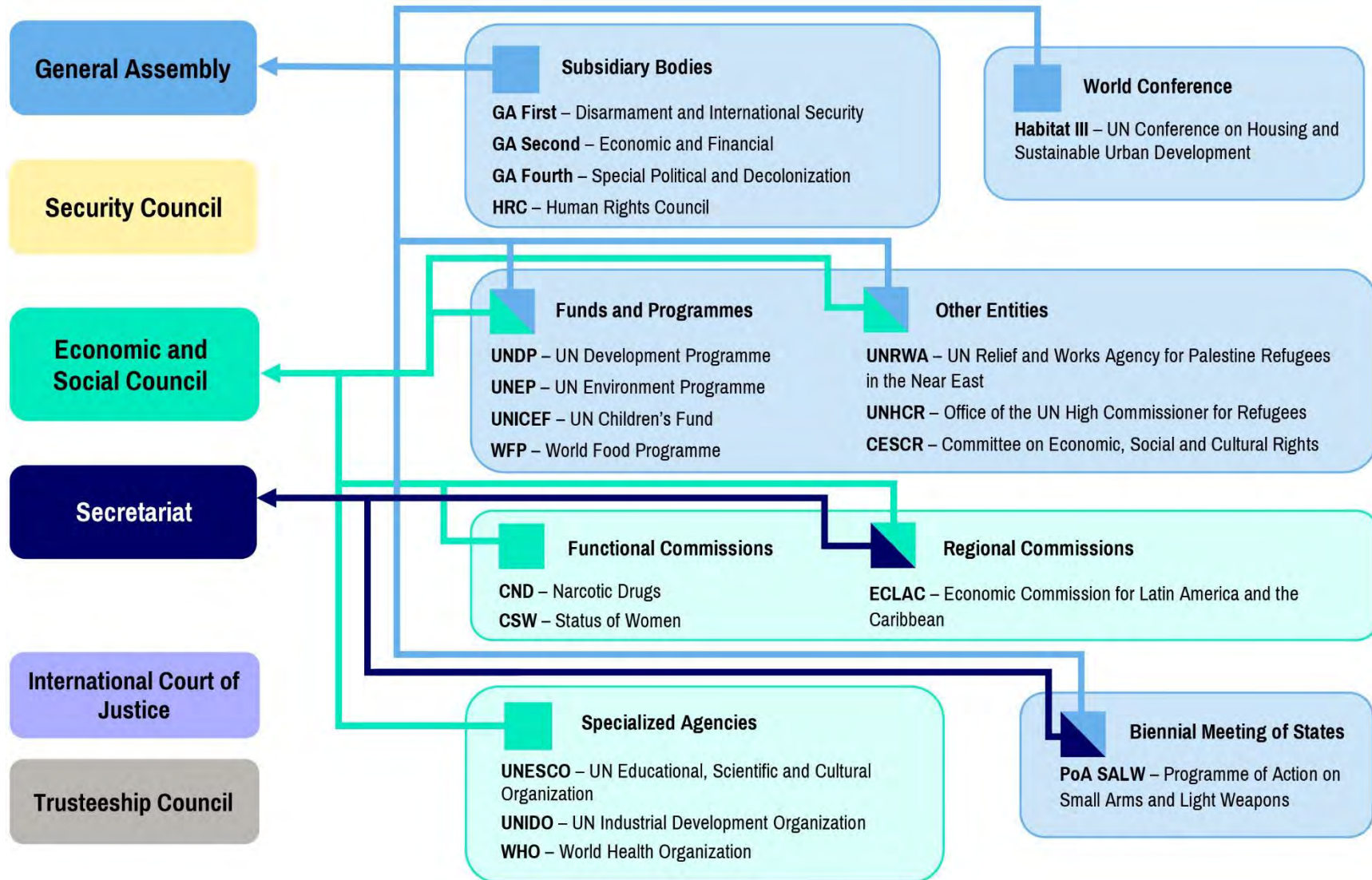


Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| BPfA | Beijing Platform for Action |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CSOs | Civil society organizations |
| CSW | Commission on the Status of Women |
| DAW | Division for the Advancement of Women |
| DEVAW | Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women |
| DSR | Declaration of Sexual Rights |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council |
| EU | European Union |
| FGM | Female genital mutilation |
| GA | General Assembly |
| GEMPI | Global Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| ICPD | International Conference on Population and Development |
| ICT | Information and communication technologies |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IPU | Inter-Parliamentary Union |
| INSTRAW | International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women |
| ICRW | International Center for Research on Women |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| OHCHR | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| oPt | Occupied Palestinian territory |
| OSAGI | Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women |
| Rio+20 | UN Conference on Sustainable Development |
| SC | Security Council |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SGBV | Sexual and gender-based violence |
| SRH | Sexual and reproductive health |
| STDs | Sexually transmitted diseases |
| UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| UN-Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UN Trust Fund | United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women |
| WMG | Women's Major Group |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

United Nations System at NMUN·NY

This diagram illustrates the UN System simulated at NMUN·NY. It shows where each committee “sits” within the system, to help understand the reportage and relationships between the 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.



Committee Overview

“I am putting out an SOS to the world: let’s STEP IT UP. We can no longer leave behind half the world’s population. Women and girls are essential equal partners for real progress, for peace, for development and for a world in balance.”¹

Introduction

A vast amount of data from various United Nations (UN) agencies, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society organizations (CSOs) depict a concerning state of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the world. In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that 35% of women worldwide have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence at some point of their lives.² The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that by the end of 2015, gender parity in education will be achieved in only 69% of Member States for primary schooling and 48% of Member States for secondary schooling.³ Furthermore, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), only 22.5% of members in parliaments worldwide are women, one of many challenges for women on the political level and in decision-making.⁴ In addition, the Women’s Major Group has stressed the prevailing economic discrimination of women who take on about 80% of the burden of domestic and unpaid care work.⁵ These facts and figures demonstrate the importance of further action by the international community to promote women’s rights and gender equality after the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to concentrate efforts on ending the most pervasive form of discrimination of our times within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): the discrimination against women and girls.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the main intergovernmental policymaking body within the United Nations in the area of women’s empowerment, promotion of women’s rights, and gender equality.⁶ It is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), reporting to ECOSOC annually.⁷ Its main priority is to mainstream gender equality and link women’s empowerment to sustainable development.⁸ Together with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and civil society actors, the Commission has been working tirelessly to guarantee that the SDGs, adopted during the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, do not only include a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment (SDG 5), but also mainstream a gender perspective within all goals.⁹ CSW and its secretariat UN-Women are the most significant international actors working closely together 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.¹⁰

In 1946, first efforts by the UN to address women’s issues were realized in a sub-commission under the Commission on Human Rights.¹¹ However, with the help of prominent advocates such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Bodil Begtrup, it became clear that the empowerment of women deserved more attention and stronger commitment from Member States.¹² As a result of the debates taking place in summer 1946, CSW was established as a fully functional commission under the auspices of ECOSOC through ECOSOC resolution 11(II).¹³

¹ UN-Women, *Remarks at “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality”* by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN-Women Executive Director, 2015.

² UN WHO, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, 2013, p. 2.

³ UNICEF, *Girls’ education and gender equality*, 2015.

⁴ IPU, *Women in national parliaments as of 1st September*, 2015.

⁵ Women’s Major Group, *Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 Presents a Bold Vision for Women and Girls Advocates Gear Up for Work to Come*, 2015.

⁶ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

⁷ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2014-15*, 2014, pp. 8-9.

⁸ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

⁹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁰ UN-Women, *Governments Endorse New Roles for Women’s Commission*, 2015.

¹¹ UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹³ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

Since its installation as full commission, CSW has been the driving force behind the still ongoing process of instituting norms related to the advancement of women. In the 1950s and 1960s, it drafted the first conventions granting crucial human rights to women and girls, such as the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* (1953) and the *Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages* (1962).¹⁴ Furthermore, CSW's work is guided by the principles of the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979), the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) and its follow-up outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (GA) entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century," as well as UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women, Peace and Security."¹⁵ Noting that CSW has been a major contributor the formulation of all of these guiding documents shows its particular importance and relevance to the normative framework of and progress in women's empowerment and gender equality.

As consequence to the UN Decade of Women from 1975 to 1985 and the Fourth World Conference on Women, CSW's mandate has undergone several expansions.¹⁶ ECOSOC resolutions 1987/22, 1996/6, and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA primarily ask CSW to assess and advance the implementation of BPfA and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA that strive for full gender equality.¹⁷ Additionally, the *Millennium Declaration* and MDGs, as well as the newly-adopted SDGs, bear the Commission's trademark guaranteeing a gender perspective in all international development efforts, including a stand-alone goal on gender equality and mainstreaming a gender-sensitive approach for the implementation of all other goals.¹⁸

Governance, Structure and Membership

The Commission consists of 45 Member States where each member is elected for a four-year term.¹⁹ The allocation of seats follows equitable geographical distribution and is, therefore, 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.²⁰ The chair and the four vice-chairs of the Commission's Bureau rotate without specific geographical regulations and are elected for two-year terms.²¹ The Bureau addresses all necessary preparation for the annual meetings of CSW, identifying emerging issues, trends, focus areas or possible new approaches to implementing BPfA and all other relevant policy guidelines and providing the findings as a summary of the chair.²² This groundwork is done in consultation with all Member States and the regional groups, experts, and other relevant stakeholders, promoting interactive dialogue, e.g. high-level ministerial panels or expert group meetings.²³ 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 down by CSW and ECOSOC.²⁴ The Commission works together with the GA and ECOSOC in a multi-tiered intergovernmental process to provide guidance on the normative support functions for the fulfilment of gender equality.²⁵

In 2010, the UN's institutional setup and operational framework engaged on women's issues underwent significant restructuring in order to streamline efforts of addressing gender inequality and women's discrimination in a more effective and coherent manner.²⁶ All four major UN agencies, namely the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the International Research and Training Institute for the

¹⁴ UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-15.

¹⁷ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

¹⁸ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2)*, 2000; UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015

¹⁹ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2014-15*, 2014, p. 153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-155.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 153 & 156.

²² UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women - Report on the 59th session (E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10)*, 2015, pp. 11-15.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 9-11.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 8-14.

Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), merged and resulted in the establishment of UN-Women.²⁷ As of 2010, UN-Women serves as the Secretariat of CSW and provides guidance for operational activities aiming at the advancement of women.²⁸ Today, UN-Women supports the work of CSW further in a substantive manner providing annual documentation on critical areas of concern regarding gender equality and facilitates the interaction between the Commission and CSOs at its annual meeting, which is a key factor in the advancement of women on all levels.²⁹

The Commission has one Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women that consists of five members representing each regional group and which convenes annually a few weeks before the yearly CSW session.³⁰ The Working Group receives the confidential list of communications for consideration after they were submitted to the Human Rights Section of UN-Women, channeled to the Secretary-General and to the accused governments for the opportunity to reply.³¹ The group's meetings are closed to the public and produce a report to CSW identifying "trends and patterns of reliably-attested injustice and discriminatory practices against women."³² The Commission then takes note of the report, informs ECOSOC on its content, and makes recommendations for actions to the Council.³³ The most recent report of the Working Group highlights 11 categories in which communications have been submitted, recognizing the need for actions in areas such as various forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, violations of the right to health, and economic, political, cultural, and social discrimination based on gender stereotypes.³⁴

Mandate, Functions and Powers

The original mandate of CSW, adopted in 1946, is 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."³⁵ This mandate has been substantially expanded as a result of the Third and Fourth World Conferences on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, respectively.³⁶ In the aftermath of the *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, ECOSOC called upon the Commission to "promot[e] the objectives of equality, development and peace, monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women, and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, subregional, regional, sectoral and global levels."³⁷ As a result of the Fourth World Conference and the adoption of the BPfA, ECOSOC decided that the primary responsibility of CSW must be:

- the "catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes";
- to "assist ECOSOC in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the BPfA" and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA at all levels; and
- to advise and give policy guidance to ECOSOC and Member States accordingly.³⁸

The main functions and primary responsibilities are clearly outlined in the CSW original mandate, its expansions, and several ECOSOC resolutions on the methods of work of the Commission. These methods of work have been examined and expanded several times by ECOSOC within the last 10 years in ECOSOC resolutions 2006/9, 2009/15, and 2013/18 in order to ensure best possible coherence with the work of the Council as well as an effective approach to mainstreaming gender within the entire UN system and engaging in dialogues with government representatives, experts, and non-governmental actors to identify gaps and challenges to gender equality.³⁹ At its annual meetings the Commission adopts resolutions that are included in an annual report to ECOSOC.⁴⁰

²⁷ UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰ UN-Women, *Communications Procedure*, 2015.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women - Report on the 59th session (E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10)*, 2015, pp. 37-40.

³⁵ UN ECOSOC, *Journal of the Economic and Social Council – Commission on the Status of Women (Res. 11(II))*, 1946, p. 525.

³⁶ UN CSW, *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2006.

³⁷ UN ECOSOC, *Measures to strengthen the role and functions of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/1987/22)*, 1987.

³⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/RES/1996/6)*, 1996.

³⁹ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*, 2015.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Taking into consideration the report of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on “Ways and means to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women” (E/CN.6/2014/14), CSW, in its 59th session in March 2015, adopted a draft resolution to be considered by ECOSOC outlining the future organization and methods of work of CSW.⁴¹ In June 2015, upon recommendation by CSW, ECOSOC adopted a resolution which clearly defines and sets out the “Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women” (E/RES/2015/6).⁴² The Commission will continue to meet annually to provide normative 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.⁴³ During those sessions, CSW facilitates ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues with experts and civil society actors to discuss local, national, regional, and global data-based experiences, lessons learned, and best practices on BPfA and outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA, to identify successful key policy initiatives and strategies.⁴⁴ The Commission continues to organize the Beijing reviews and use the momentum therein to commit Member States and strengthen their political will.⁴⁵ Furthermore, CSW will contribute to the annual theme of ECOSOC, strengthening the Council’s impact, and work closely with all other gender-specific UN entities, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to contribute to their work.⁴⁶ Those working methods will be further elaborated during the 60th session of the Commission as well as in the upcoming annual report of the Secretary-General to the Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective in order to guarantee effectiveness in promoting women’s rights, meaningful contribution to the UN high-level political forum on sustainable development, and the practical inclusion of a gender perspective in the post-2015 development agenda.⁴⁷

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

The most recent 59th session of CSW, held from 9-20 March 2015, focused on the BPfA and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA, as the fundamental document of BPfA celebrated its 20th anniversary.⁴⁸ The long ongoing global, regional, and national review processes culminated in the adoption of a “Political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women” (E/CN.6/2015/L.1) by ministers and high-level representatives of governments reaffirming their commitment to the implementation of the BPfA and the advancement of women.⁴⁹ In accordance with CSW’s mandate and taking into account the developments that lie ahead of the Commission and the UN system as a whole, the 59th session identified persisting gaps in the achievement of gender equality and the underlying causes and challenges that impede the implementation of the BPfA.⁵⁰ On International Women’s Day 2015 the campaign “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality” was launched to call upon governments to recommit to the objectives once signed in the BPfA.⁵¹ In addition, the session recognized opportunities that the post-2015 development agenda offers for the empowerment of women if Member States fully commit to SDG 5 and the integration of a gender perspective into all other SDGs.⁵² The adopted political declaration stressed monitoring and accountability to accelerate full and effective implementation of BPfA.⁵³ Furthermore, within the context of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the declaration set the deadline of 2030 for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment.⁵⁴

During the upcoming 60th session of CSW, which convenes in March 2016, the Commission will be addressing women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development as its priority theme, which will show the way forward for ECOSOC actions to ensure gender mainstreaming and the implementation of a gender perspective

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of CSW (E/RES/2015/6)*, 2015.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3 & 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ UN-Women, *CSW59/Beijing+20 (2015)*, 2015.

⁴⁹ UN CSW, *Political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, 2015.

⁵⁰ UN-Women, *CSW59/Beijing+20 (2015)*, 2015.

⁵¹ UN-Women, *About Step It Up*, 2015.

⁵² UN-Women, *CSW59/Beijing+20 (2015)*, 2015.

⁵³ UN CSW, *Political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, 2015.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

within the post-2015 framework and the 17 SDGs.⁵⁵ Moreover, CSW will be reviewing the work and progress made on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.⁵⁶ Furthermore, at the 60th session, the Commission will be deciding its future multi-year program of work which will enable the Bureau to prepare the sessions appropriately.⁵⁷ Additionally, the Commission adopted a draft resolution on the “Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women” for action by ECOSOC, raising concerns about the humanitarian crisis and still-critical situation of women and girls, especially in the Gaza Strip, still dealing with the detrimental effects of the military operation during July and August 2014.⁵⁸ The Commission calls for stronger female participation in conflict resolution and peace efforts in the region.⁵⁹ Remaining seized of the matter at its 60th session, CSW will take into consideration the report of the Secretary-General on “The situation of, and assistance to, Palestinian women.”⁶⁰

Following the Sustainable Development Summit of 25-27 September 2015, the adoption of the SDGs now guide efforts of CSW and the international community towards achieving SDG 5 as well as integrating a gender perspective in all SDGs, considering its cross-cutting nature and the evident “gender dimensions of poverty, hunger, health, education, water and sanitation, employment, safe cities and peace and security.”⁶¹ The latest “Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action” took place for the first time on 27 September 2015, and together with the upcoming 60th session, will bring about momentum to implement the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* in regards to gender equality.⁶² The meeting was an opportunity for heads of states to “step it up” and prove political will to advance women’s rights in all spheres of society.⁶³

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. Nonetheless, the Commission, together with UN-Women and other relevant UN entities, have to further align their efforts to achieve total gender equality and the full realization of women’s and girls’ universal human rights in an effective, coherent, and comprehensive manner. Furthermore, CSW has to continue to follow-up on the final implementation of the BPfA and outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA as well as assess the progress of women’s advancement within the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. With the help of CSOs, expert meetings, and UN-Women reports, CSW must identify prevailing and newly emerging gaps and challenges to gender equality and address them in an effective manner in their annual meetings advising ECOSOC in their draft resolutions and Agreed Conclusions to take action accordingly to empower women on a local, national, regional, and global level. The policy guidance provided by CSW is making it one of the most important actors on women’s issues worldwide. CSW is setting the pace for change by establishing more and more progressive norms and standards, advising Member States how to accomplish full gender equality.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ UN-Women, *CSW60 (2016)*, 2015.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2014-15*, 2014, p. 152.

⁵⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women - Report on the 59th session (E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10)*, 2015, pp. 7-10.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁰ UN-Women, *CSW60 (2016) – Official Documents*, 2015.

⁶¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁶² UN-Women, *World leaders agree: We must close the gender gap*, 2015.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ 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.

Annotated Bibliography

New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2014). *United Nations Handbook 2014-15*. Retrieved 21 July 2015 from: <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/UNHB2014/UN-Handbook-201415-17-nov-interactive.pdf>

The United Nations Handbook, produced 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 GA resolutions regarding the mandate and structure of the commission.

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2015). *Report on the fifty-ninth session (E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10)*. Retrieved 21 July 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/E/2015/27>

The 2015 report of the CSW to the ECOSOC is a summary of the work that CSW has accomplished within the last two years (Beijing+20 national and regional review processes) culminating in the 59th session in March 2015. This document offers delegates information on the most pressing themes currently addressed in the CSW as well as its organizational structure. It provides not only a draft resolution on the “future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women” but also the political declaration on Beijing+20 review process that is considered a core function of CSW. Further, the report includes a full list of all considered documents during the session from reports by the Secretary-General, chair summaries of the ministerial round tables and panel discussions, notes by the secretariat, etc.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *Commission on the Status of Women* [Website]. Retrieved 21 July 2015 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

This website is the perfect 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 58th (2014) and 59th (2015) sessions. For further research it provides links to the history, official outcome documents, non-governmental organization participation as well as the CSW Communications Procedure of the Working Group.

United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Retrieved 21 July 2015 from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

The mandate of CSW is substantively based on the BPfA and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the GA. The Commission is conducting evaluations of all 12 critical areas of concern as a whole that are addressed in the Declaration as well as separately in review themes and basing their normative policy recommendations and agreed conclusions on the respective findings. Therefore, it is important for delegates to familiarize themselves with the areas as they are leading the path towards full gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' universal rights.

United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-ninth session. (2014). *Proposed strategic framework for the period 2016-2017: Programme 14, Gender equality and empowerment of women (A/69/6 (Prog.14))*. Retrieved 21 July 2015 from: [http://undocs.org/A/69/6\(Prog.14\)](http://undocs.org/A/69/6(Prog.14))

It is worthwhile for delegates to learn about the strategies the Intergovernmental Support, Coordination and Strategic Partnerships Bureau is suggesting in order to foster the participation of Member States in accelerating full gender equality. Delegates should take those approaches to think about concrete actions their represented country would support and might even take a leading role in promoting them during the Committee's session. The strategic framework further helps delegates to understand how UN-Women is playing a significant role in enhancing the work and building the capacity of CSW to address gender inequality by outlining important intersection of the two entities, such as UN-Women's documentation to CSW and their involvement in engaging non-governmental actors in the process of women's empowerment. It furthermore provides delegates with an extensive list of GA resolutions, ECOSOC resolutions and declarations, SC resolutions, CSW agreed conclusions as well as UN-Women Executive Board decisions that are dealing with gender equality.



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I. The Impact of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence on Reproductive Health

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35% of women have been exposed to either physical or sexual gender-based violence (SGBV).⁶⁵ The significance of this figure demonstrates that the issue of SGBV has effects not only at the individual and national levels, but also in the international community.⁶⁶ Various entities within the United Nations (UN) system have introduced different definitions and criteria for classifying SGBV, all of which have stemmed from the international framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶⁷ The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has affirmed the link between women's empowerment and sustainable development, while noting that the eradication of sexual violence and SGBV is necessary to achieve these goals.⁶⁸

It is important to distinguish between SGBV and sexual violence; SGBV describes violence used to target individuals or groups based on their gender, while sexual violence is a form of SGBV that includes any threat, attempt, or act of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse.⁶⁹ Sexual violence and SGBV can include the same forms of physical, psychological, and emotional harm, but SGBV is targeted at a person purely because of their gender; it affects the targeted gender negatively and disproportionately.⁷⁰ Rape, torture, sexual slavery, genital mutilation, and sexual harassment are just a few of the ways SGBV manifests in society.⁷¹ During times of conflict, threats and acts of SGBV are used to instill fear and for perpetrators to exert dominance and control over civilians.⁷² The devastating consequences of SGBV on reproductive health are commonly overlooked when implementing policies that originate from international and regional frameworks, although such consequences add to the magnitude of the problem.⁷³

The UN defines sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of reproductive disease or infirmity;” SRH oversees all sexual and reproductive health processes and functions throughout the life cycle.⁷⁴ The *Declaration of Sexual Rights* (DSR) (1997), which was revised in 2014, lists 16 fundamental sexual and human rights, including the right to equality, right to be free from all forms of violence, and the right to the highest attainable standard of sexual health.⁷⁵ Attaining the highest standard of sexual health is hindered by acts of SGBV, which further violate numerous sexual and human rights.⁷⁶ SGBV can have fatal and nonfatal physical and mental outcomes that impact SRH, including, but not limited to, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), pre- and post-natal complications, and psychological trauma.⁷⁷ The social culture created in societies where such forms of violence are present embeds a structural violence into societal norms.⁷⁸ Limited access to medical services, education, and resources are common for victims of SGBV.⁷⁹ In 2011, over 800,000 adolescent men and women were newly diagnosed with HIV in developing countries alone; over 60% of those diagnosed were women with relating factors of gender inequality and sexual violence predominant in their communities.⁸⁰ The physical, emotional, and social consequences that stem from sexual violence and SGBV can create a stigma that may make victims feel ashamed and responsible for the violations that have occurred, which can

⁶⁵ UN WHO, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, 2013, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Greig et al., *Men and the Prevention of Gender-based Violence: A Conceptual Framework for Policy Change*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2013/18)*, 2013, p. 2.

⁶⁹ IRIN, *Our Bodies – Their Battle Ground: Gender-based violence in Conflict Zones*, 2004, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷² UN Security Council, *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1820 (2008))*, 2008, pp. 1-2.

⁷³ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 1.

⁷⁴ UNFPA, *Making Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health a Reality for All: Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health Framework*, 2008, p. 6.

⁷⁵ WAS, *Declaration of Sexual Rights*, 1997, pp. 1-3.

⁷⁶ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ UN WHO, *Women's health*, 2013.

cause them to remain silent about the issue.⁸¹ Breaking the “culture of silence” on SRH consequences that stem from SGBV can be achieved through policy reform and the further promotion of women’s empowerment and gender equality with the implementation of the SDGs.⁸²

International and Regional Framework

Various international and regional frameworks take into account the overarching problem of gender inequality in which the issue of SGBV and its effects on SRH are intertwined.⁸³ The *Charter of the United Nations* (1946), the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (DEVAW) (1993), the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the DSR all describe the importance of gender equality, which cannot be achieved without eradicating sexual violence against women and attaining the highest standard of SRH.⁸⁴ CEDAW and DEVAW are the two principle documents that have clauses specific to addressing sexual violence and discrimination that leads to SGBV.⁸⁵ CEDAW has been considered an “international bill of rights for women,” and it is the only human rights treaty that includes women’s reproductive rights.⁸⁶ DEVAW outlines eight rights of women that are commonly suppressed in times of conflict and unequal societies, each addressing gender equality as a whole or specific issues that act as a catalyst for structural violence.⁸⁷ “The right to equal protection under the law,” “the right to just and favorable conditions of work,” and, “the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health” are specific examples of rights commonly infringed upon in societies impacted by SGBV.⁸⁸

In 2008, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) drafted a framework titled, “Making Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health a Reality for All.”⁸⁹ This policy framework specifically outlines the differences of reproductive rights and SRH while noting priority issues for policy development linked to trends in SGBV that impede making reproductive rights and SRH a reality for all.⁹⁰ Reproductive rights are for individuals to decide freely – without violence or discrimination – the number, spacing, and timing of their children.⁹¹ SRH focuses upon the healthcare services that are essential for people to realize their reproductive rights, e.g. family planning, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and STDs, and safe pre- and post-natal care.⁹² CSW has prioritized the promotion of reproductive healthcare services, eliminating the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the empowerment of women.⁹³ All of these priorities are embedded in CEDAW, having an effect on overall SRH.⁹⁴

Since 2000, the UN Security Council (SC) has adopted resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), and 2122 (2013) on “Women, Peace and Security.”⁹⁵ These resolutions provide a framework for UN Peacekeeping on how to monitor and implement policies specific to women’s role in conflict and post-conflict societies as well as conflict resolution processes, “[urging] Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision making levels ... and mechanisms for prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.”⁹⁶ This framework aims to mitigate the use of sexual violence as a tool of war, specifically

⁸¹ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸³ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104)*, 1993, pp. 1-3.

⁸⁴ UN DESA, *Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women (ST/ESA/329)*, 2010, pp. 1-3.

⁸⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979; UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104)*, 1993.

⁸⁶ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979, p. 194.

⁸⁷ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104)*, 1993, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ UNFPA, *Making Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health a Reality for All: Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health Framework*, 2008.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ UN-Women, *Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls*, 2014, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ UN Peacekeeping, *Women, peace and security*, 2015.

⁹⁶ UN Security Council, *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*, 2000, p. 2.

stated in resolution 1820 (2008), while protecting women and children in times of conflict from violence that will have a negative impact on their reproductive rights and SRH, as stated in resolution 1888 (2009).⁹⁷ The SC is promoting the empowerment of women by recognizing the impact SGBV can have on a conflict-driven society.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the SC is committed to formulating specific policies that include women in the peacebuilding processes and strengthen policies regarding sexual violence through the “Women, Peace and Security” framework.⁹⁹

The MDGs, the foundational international framework for policy development in gender equality, SGBV, and SRH for the past 15 years, will expire at the end of 2015 and will be replaced by the SDGs (adopted in September 2015), making it necessary to understand their effectiveness as well as how goals pertaining to SGBV and SRH have been adapted for this new framework.¹⁰⁰ In the Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme of the 58th session on “Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls,” the Commission heavily criticized the process of achieving gender equality.¹⁰¹ The Commission highlights that poverty-stricken regions where gender discrimination and SGBV are most predominate have shown a significant lack of progress.¹⁰² This is a result of poor institutional structures and capacity, providing an atmosphere for poverty and SGBV to grow.¹⁰³ SGBV increases child mortality, worsens maternal health care and outcomes, increases HIV/AIDS prevalence, and does not promote gender equality or the empowerment of women, yet there was no MDG to specifically target SGBV.¹⁰⁴ The adopted SDG 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” follows up on MDG 3, “Promote gender equality and empower women.”¹⁰⁵ The improvement of maternal health is a specific target built within SDG 5 to increase the effectiveness of policies to reach gender equality and the SDGs as a whole.¹⁰⁶ SGBV and SRH are addressed in these targets in an attempt to achieve gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls in order to achieve sustainable development.¹⁰⁷

Role of the International System

Many bodies within the UN system discuss SGBV, but it has been a reoccurring topic for CSW. In 2016, the review theme of the Commission is on “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls;” this was also the priority theme for the Commission in 2013.¹⁰⁸ At its 57th session, CSW agreed on the need to protect and promote the fundamental human rights of women, including their reproductive rights, and the need for sufficient healthcare services that can aid in SRH.¹⁰⁹ The priority theme in 2016 for CSW is: “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development.”¹¹⁰ The themes for 2016 align with what the Commission values most in the SDGs, specifically Goal 5.¹¹¹ In 2013, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) produced a report calling for a stand-alone goal focused on gender equality, women’s rights, and women’s empowerment.¹¹² The outcome of that report has led to the development of proposed SDG 5, and the Commission believes “[SDG 5] has the potential to transform unequal power relations between men and

⁹⁷ UN Peacekeeping, *Women, peace and security*, 2015.

⁹⁸ UN Security Council, *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*, 2000, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹ UN DPI, *Security Council renews commitment to landmark resolution on women, peace and security*, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ UN DESA, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*, 2015, pp. 4-7.

¹⁰¹ UN-Women, *Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls*, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰³ UNFPA, *Combating Gender-Based Violence: The Key to Achieving the MDGs*, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, pp. 5-7.

¹⁰⁵ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, 2014, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ ICGV, *Integrating Gender Based Violence into the post-2015 development agenda*, 2013, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2013/18)*, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ UN-Women, *Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls: 2013 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*, 2013, pp. 3-5.

¹¹⁰ UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2013/18)*, 2013, p. 3.

¹¹¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 18.

¹¹² UN-Women, *A Transformative Stand-Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Empowerment: Imperative and Key Components*, 2013, pp. 2-3.

women and address structural barriers impeding progress.”¹¹³ Structural barriers include sexual violence, such as that inflicted upon the approximately 133 million girls who have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM).¹¹⁴ It is situations such as this that CSW believes can be addressed through the SDGs.¹¹⁵

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in 1994 by the UNFPA in coordination with the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) to “set out an ambitious agenda to deliver inclusive, equitable and sustainable global development.”¹¹⁶ The ICPD had a heavy focus on reproductive rights and SRH that created a framework to ensure “accessible, affordable, acceptable, and convenient” healthcare services, while ensuring SRH needs are met throughout the lifecycle of both women and family.¹¹⁷ A follow-up conference, known as ICPD Beyond 2014, was held in 2014 to renew the ideals discussed at ICPD and identify challenges that emerged in the last two decades.¹¹⁸ Women’s empowerment and gender equality were at the forefront of the discussion, encouraging Member States to “remove legal, regulatory and social barriers to reproductive health information and care for adolescents.”¹¹⁹ CPD, in conjunction with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and other UN entities, is implementing specific policies related to improving the standards of SRH while attempting to ensure their longevity throughout the lifecycle.¹²⁰

A 2014 report issued by UN-Women and transmitted to CSW and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) provides insight into the impacts and achievements of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund), another important entity.¹²¹ The UN Trust Fund was formed by the adoption of General Assembly (GA) resolution 50/166 of 16 February 1996 with the purpose of addressing violence against women through providing grants.¹²² Such grants can be provided to “governments and community organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and the public and private sectors.”¹²³ Since its inauguration, the UN Trust Fund has awarded over \$103 million to 393 initiatives to end violence against women and girls.¹²⁴ In 2014, the UN Trust Fund emphasized addressing violence through education and leadership development, implementing laws and policies to combat violence against women, and advanced transitional justice mechanisms through addressing violence against women in conflict settings.¹²⁵ The UN Trust Fund programs benefitted over 700,000 women and girls in 2014 in four large geographical areas worldwide.¹²⁶

The UN Trust Fund looks for civil society organizations (CSOs) that share its interests of preventing violence against women, expanding access to services for women survivors of violence, and strengthening implementation laws to receive program grants.¹²⁷ Fundació Sida i Societat (FSIS) is a CSO operating in Guatemala and a beneficiary of a UN Trust Fund grant.¹²⁸ FSIS educates institutions working in the field of sexual violence, such as medical and judicial bodies, supporting the capacity building of institutions and response mechanisms for those

¹¹³ UN-Women, *Why Goal 5 matters*, 2015.

¹¹⁴ UN-Women, *Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women*, 2014.

¹¹⁵ UN-Women, *Why Goal 5 matters*, 2015.

¹¹⁶ UNFPA, *Programme of Action*, 2014, p. viii.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014: Report of the Secretary-General (A/69/62)*, 2014, pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²¹ UN HRC and UN CSW, *Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2015/6)*, 2014, p. 1.

¹²² UN General Assembly, *The role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in eliminating violence against women (A/RES/50/166)*, 1996, pp. 2-3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁴ UN HRC and UN CSW, *Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2015/6)*, 2014, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

¹²⁸ UN-Women, *UN Trust Fund grantees – 18th cycle (2015)*, 2015.

victimised by sexual violence.¹²⁹ In doing so, it is attempting to increase the standard of SRH that has been negatively impacted by SGBV.¹³⁰

Gender Equality and Connections to Sustainable Development

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are reoccurring themes for ECOSOC, UN-Women, and CSW, as it is understood that they are necessary to fully attain women’s rights and sustainable development.¹³¹ It is important to understand the principles of gender equality and women’s empowerment that these foundational frameworks speak of. In connection with sustainable development, it is estimated that 1.2-2% of gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide is lost due to domestic violence.¹³² It is also estimated that 35% of women are exposed to SGBV worldwide, which furthermore exemplifies the economic drawbacks – as well as the social and political drawbacks – to SGBV.¹³³ Promoting empowerment when discussing the implications of SGBV on SRH can be difficult due to the “culture of silence” formed around the issue, which furthermore suppresses women’s skills, talents, and experiences that are necessary for sustainable development.¹³⁴

WHO reports that approximately 30% of women that have had a relationship have encountered sexual or physical violence, and nearly “38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.”¹³⁵ Many individuals, couples, and families would like to believe the home is a “safe haven” or place of refuge from violence, but statistics show that much of the violence against women originates in an interdependent relationship.¹³⁶ When such violence takes place in the privacy of the household by individual(s) who the victim knows, it creates a psychological and emotional burden on the victim that they have nowhere to go and cannot trust anyone.¹³⁷ This outcome creates a “culture of silence” where victims cannot or do not want to discuss the problems they are facing due to cultural stigma or personal isolation.¹³⁸ The culture that perpetuates such violence or stigma around the issue of interpersonal violence suppresses skills, talents, and experiences that are necessary for full sustainable development of societies.¹³⁹ In line with this, UNFPA conducted a study outlining “the interface between the historical, political, social, and cultural contexts of indigenous peoples, including the structural, underlying causes and risk factors associated with violence against indigenous women and girls.”¹⁴⁰ Historical, political, social, and cultural stigmas create a barrier to ending SGBV through manifestations of violence, sexual exploitation, and economic exploitation that vary in different socio-economic regions of the world.¹⁴¹ Addressing and ending stigmas placed on the survivors of SGBV is one of the first steps to combatting it, and a pathway to ensuring better SRH outcomes for women.¹⁴²

SGBV can occur throughout an individual’s lifespan and will have different repercussions on her/his SRH at different stages in physical development.¹⁴³ As women age and physically develop, they become more susceptible to forms of SGBV that can have dramatic effects on their SRH.¹⁴⁴ FGM, sexual abuse, rape, physical abuse, and sexual harassment are common within the childhood, adolescent, and reproductive stages of the life cycle.¹⁴⁵ Sex-selective abortion, infanticide, child marriage, child prostitution, and elder abuse are more common within the prenatal, infancy, and old age categories; physical and emotional abuse is prevalent throughout all stages.¹⁴⁶ These forms of

¹²⁹ UN-Women, *UN Trust Fund grantees – 18th cycle (2015)*, 2015.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ UN-Women, *Annual Report 2014-2015*, 2015, p. 5.

¹³² World Bank, *Violence against Women Exact High Economic Price, World Bank Says*, 2013.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 3.

¹³⁵ UN WHO, *Violence against women*, 2014.

¹³⁶ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 29.

¹³⁷ UN-Women, *Annual Report 2014-2015*, 2015, p. 9.

¹³⁸ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ UNFPA, *Breaking the Silence on Violence against Indigenous Girls, Adolescents and Young Women*, 2013, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

SGBV, many of which can be classified as human rights violations or crimes against humanity, are suppressing SRH by impeding the victim's overall bodily autonomy and wellbeing.¹⁴⁷

In order to alleviate the devastating consequences of SGBV on SRH, from an institutional framework perspective, the SDGs will have to provide a foundation for a sustainable policy prescription process that will focus on eradicating violence against women.¹⁴⁸ Target 7 of SDG 3 also includes “[ensuring] universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.”¹⁴⁹ These SDG targets, with specific impacts to the effects of SGBV on reproductive health, work towards the umbrella goal to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.”¹⁵⁰ The Panzi Foundation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is working towards this notion of an inclusive society by raising awareness and advocating to end violence against women, as well as supporting hospitals in their work with victims.¹⁵¹ By specifically integrating gender issues into the SDGs, linking SRH rights to established programs, and conducting new research on the impact of SGBV on SRH, the international community will gain a better understanding and appreciation of the sensitivity of the topic, therefore, breaking the “culture of silence” and working towards sustainable development.¹⁵²

Effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health

Various forms of SGBV can have an impact of SRH. According to UNAIDS, as of 2014, the world prevalence rate of HIV amongst young adults aged 15-49 was 0.8%, and reaches as high as 27% in Swaziland.¹⁵³ The prevalence of intimate partner violence reaches as high as 69% in Benin and discriminatory attitudes towards individuals living with HIV reaches as high as 84% in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.¹⁵⁴ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 1,100 rapes are reported monthly.¹⁵⁵ Of the estimated 2.5 million people trafficked annually, over 80% are estimated to be women.¹⁵⁶ In European Union (EU) member countries, an estimated 40-50% of women are sexually harassed.¹⁵⁷ Sexual harassment can take the form of physical or structural violence, ranging from unwanted sexual advances to sexual assault, all of which place a stigma on reproductive rights and SRH.¹⁵⁸ These statistics exemplify that various socio-economic regions are affected by different manifestations of violence, sexual exploitation, and economic exploitation.¹⁵⁹ Through advocacy and awareness of worldwide physical, psychological, and emotional effects of SGBV on SRH, the “culture of silence” that causes victims to feel ashamed and responsible for the violations that occurred upon them should subside, furthermore decreasing the prevalence of SGBV that effect SRH.¹⁶⁰

Female Genital Mutilation

FGM is a human rights violation that stems from deep-rooted gender inequality.¹⁶¹ According to WHO, FGM “comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”¹⁶² FGM is a commonly accepted traditional social convention practiced in many developing countries but is also used as a tool of war.¹⁶³ It is estimated 133 million women have undergone FGM and three million women a year are at risk of it.¹⁶⁴ In a 2008 revised draft resolution on “Ending female genital mutilation,” CSW called on Member States to fulfill their obligations within the international and

¹⁴⁷ WAS, *Declaration of Sexual Rights*, 1997, pp. 1-3.

¹⁴⁸ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 16.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵¹ UN-Women, *UN Trust Fund grantees – 18th cycle (2015)*, 2015.

¹⁵² UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 3.

¹⁵³ UNAIDS, *AIDSinfo*, 2014.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ UN DPI, *Violence Against Women*, 2011, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR's Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority*, 2005, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁹ UNFPA, *Breaking the Silence on Violence against Indigenous Girls, Adolescents and Young Women*, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ UN CSW, *Ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2008/L.2/Rev.1)*, 2008, pp. 1-3.

¹⁶² UN WHO, *Female genital mutilation*, 2014.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ UN DPI, *Violence Against Women*, 2011, pp. 1-2.

regional framework previously discussed to empower women and break the cycle of discrimination.¹⁶⁵ As the majority of FGM occurs in developing countries, predominately in Africa, the resolution urges Member States to allocate sufficient resources and training to those working with the victims whilst providing support services for the physical, psychological, and emotional harm the mutilation will have caused.¹⁶⁶ It further requested that Member States provide sufficient information to the Secretary-General regarding the allocation of resources to be presented to the Commission.¹⁶⁷ The GA also in 2013 adopted resolution 67/146 on “Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations.”¹⁶⁸ The WHO has discussed FGM, calling for an increased response by health professionals to aid victims, research and build evidence of the presence of FGM, and advocate to help develop an international framework for handling FGM.¹⁶⁹

Maternal Health

Maternal health describes reproductive health and wellbeing, from pregnancy through childbirth and the postpartum period.¹⁷⁰ The consequences of the devastating relationship between SGBV and maternal health are varied; some consequences include pregnancy resulting from rape, maternal and child mortality, difficulty finding care for women experiencing abuse, lack of treatment for women affected by SGBV, and an increased risk of STD transmission.¹⁷¹ While progress has been made on maternal health, such as the reduction of the maternal mortality ratio by nearly half since 1990 and a 12% increase in births assisted by a skilled health professional between 1990 and 2014, meeting the established targets of MDG 5 (to improve maternal health) has been hindered as populations vulnerable to SGBV, primarily in developing countries, have been neglected due to societal inequalities.¹⁷² On maternal health, Mahmoud Fathalla of the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has said, “Women are not dying of diseases we can’t treat... They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving.”¹⁷³ Due to the uneven progress on MDG 5, the international community renewed its commitment to this issue through SDGs 3 and 5, in particular, to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by eliminating all preventable deaths before 2030.¹⁷⁴ The SDGs aim “to complete what [the MDGs] did not achieve” by reaching the most vulnerable regions affected by the maternal health consequences associated with SGBV.¹⁷⁵

Delivering appropriate maternal health and SRH services to developing Member States, and especially through humanitarian intervention in conflict and post-conflict regions, helps address harmful consequences of SGBV.¹⁷⁶ In one example in sub-Saharan Africa, contraceptive use among women 15-49 who are married or in a union increased from 13% to 28% between 1990 and 2015, yet the unmet need for family planning remains quite prevalent, totaling 24% among the same population.¹⁷⁷ Family planning and contraceptive use is still risky for women in violent situations; intimate partners may intervene and prevent use, leading to a higher rate of unintended and/or adolescent pregnancy and unsafe abortions.¹⁷⁸ Maternal health and SGBV are inextricably linked, making it imperative to combat stigmas associated with family planning and SRH education, as well as to acknowledge and address the consequences and opportunities for women and for Member States.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁵ UN CSW, *Ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2008/L.2/Rev.1)*, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ UN General Assembly, *Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation (A/RES/67/146)*, 2013, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ UN WHO World Health Assembly, *Female Genital Mutilation (WHA61.16)*, 2008, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ UN WHO, *Maternal health*, 2015.

¹⁷¹ PRB, *Gender-Based Violence: Impediment to Reproductive Health*, 2010, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷² UN DESA, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*, 2015, p. 43.

¹⁷³ Amnesty International, *Maternal Health is a Human Right*, 2015.

¹⁷⁴ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, pp. 5-7.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷⁶ UN WHO, *Saving Lives Protecting Futures: Progress Report on the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health*, 2015, pp. 45-47.

¹⁷⁷ UN DESA, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*, 2015, p. 41.

¹⁷⁸ PRB, *Gender-Based Violence: Impediment to Reproductive Health*, 2010, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 7.

Conclusion

SGBV is an unmistakable threat to sustainable development, as it has various negative implications at the local, regional, and international levels.¹⁸⁰ Through activism and public awareness that seeks to address the underlying causes of SGBV and understand the impacts it has on SRH, victims can be empowered to break the “culture of silence” and speak out, especially regarding sensitive forms of SGBV, such as FGM.¹⁸¹ By aiding communities to reach the highest attainable standard of SRH, victim’s skills, talents, and experiences that were once suppressed can be brought forward and integrated into society.¹⁸² As displayed by the SDGs, sustainable development is not possible without achieving gender equality. Such equality needs to occur in the present and be sustained through the future. By attaining a higher standard of SRH, the international community will be acting upon the prescribed international framework and be working towards an era of more full gender equality and sustainable development.

Further Research

While researching this topic, delegates should consider the following questions: Is the stand-alone approach of promoting gender equality and women empowerment satisfactory for attaining the highest possible standard of SRH by counteracting SGBV? What mechanism can be used to break the “culture of silence” commonly seen in developing countries with a low standard of SRH? How much of an impact will promoting individual skills, traits, and experiences in a community have on sustainable development? To what degree does the international community need to intervene if they wish to eradicate specific forms of violence against women, such as FGM? What is the connection between SGBV and reproductive health? What are other types of reproductive health impacted by SGBV?

¹⁸⁰ UNFPA, *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications*, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸² UN-Women and UN Global Compact, *Women’s Empowerment Principles*, 2011, p. 1.

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Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence. (2013). *Integrating Gender Based Violence into the post-2015 development agenda*. Retrieved 19 July 2015 from: <http://gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Discussion-Paper-Post-2015.pdf>

This discussion paper from the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence is a primary example of a civil society organization promoting its thoughts and ideologies regarding this topic to the larger international community. The paper critically evaluates the progress of eliminating gender-based violence in the Millennium Development Goals and produces key recommendations for consideration in the post-2015 development agenda. This paper relates directly to the theme of the topic, specifically the bridge between the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, as they are put into action. Delegates will receive a clear understanding of how civil society can impact development post-2015, and can use the recommendations provided to further their research.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015). *Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*. Retrieved 17 July 2015 from:

[http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)

This report is a cornerstone for delegate research; by providing an overview of what the Millennium Development Goals were and accomplishments and failures of the MDGs, the report introduces the fact that gender inequality is still a pressing issue and creates links to the need for gender equality and sustainable development. This report will provide delegates with the necessary knowledge to understand that gender inequality fuels SGBV, which further impacts reproductive health. The guide will begin at the grassroots level of reproductive health issues associated with SGBV and build upon the linkage of sustainable development.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and United Nations Global Compact Office. (2011). *Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business* [Report]. Second Edition. Retrieved 18 July 2015 from:

http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/partnerships/businesses%20and%20foundations/women-s-empowerment-principles_en%20pdf.pdf

This report published by UN-Women, in partnership with the United Nations Global Compact Office, explains the seven principles of women's empowerment, provides examples of how these principles can be used, and tells how the principles can be measured. The report provides overview statistics related to women's empowerment and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as a comprehensive understanding of terminology necessary for delegates to become properly educated on the topic. This report relates directly to the linkage to sustainable development while providing delegates with an easy-to-follow base for their research.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2014). *Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls: Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions*. Retrieved 16 September 2015 from:

http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/58/csw58_agreed_conclusions.pdf?v=1&d=20140924T011525

This report, which provides the agreed conclusions from the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, specifically discusses the challenges and achievements of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to women and girls. The report reaffirms many of the common relationships between sexual and gender-based violence, gender equality, and sustainable development, but criticizes the progress of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. This report is important for delegates to understand the efficacy of the Millennium Development Goals were for eliminating violence against women and provides a base for linkages to be made to what should occur with the Sustainable Development Goals.

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 17 July 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/34/180>

Often described as a bill of rights for women, this fundamental treaty defines what discrimination is in various contexts and establishes the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This document is crucial to the topic, as it outlines not only a basic definition of discrimination, but also women's rights as they pertain to marriage, sex, and other socio-economic issues. These rights can be applied directly to the human rights violations that occur in SGBV and the impacts such violations have on reproductive health. This treaty will provide delegates with the knowledge of what the international community believes discrimination against women to be and is a strong source to expand their research upon.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 21 October 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

This Agenda provides delegates with all of the necessary resources to understand the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. It also gives information on the history of the formation of the SDGs, as well as the various stakeholders involved in their development. It is vital for the delegates to have a firm understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals related to the impact of sexual and gender-based violence on reproductive health. Goals 3 and 5 have particular emphasis on this topic, while links can be drawn between all of the goals in relation to sustainable development.

United Nations Population Fund. (1998). *Reproductive Health Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Policy and Programme Implications* [Report]. Retrieved 15 July 2015 from: <http://213.55.79.31/adf/adfvi/documents/UNFPA-RH-effects-of-GBV.pdf>

This report from the UN Population Fund is a fundamental document to the topic as it clearly explains, with the help of examples, the relationship between SGBV and reproductive health. It has been noted that reproductive health issues are connected to human rights violations, and this document critically explores this connection. The "culture of silence" and the SGBV life cycle are examples that display the multiple perspectives of the issue. Delegates will be able to enrich their understanding of the topic as the document describes several perspectives on this topic.

United Nations Population Fund. (2008). *Making Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health a Reality for All: Reproductive Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health Framework*. Retrieved 24 August 2015 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SRH_Framework.pdf

UNFPA clearly explains the fundamental difference between reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health in this report. The report provides the reader with information on how sexual and reproductive health are being impacted by sexual and gender-based violence. While the report provides a strategic plan for the years 2008 to 2011 through evaluating the international frameworks established by the international community, it is helpful to see what the strategic plan for these years was, and to reflect on what was achieved and what was not. This report provides delegates with a strong relationship to sexual and reproductive health and how past strategic plans have been implemented, which allows delegates to consider effectiveness.

United Nations, Security Council, 4213th Meeting. (2000). *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))* [Resolution]. Retrieved 22 August 2015 from: [http://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000))

Women, Peace and Security is a cornerstone resolution by the Security Council that emphasizes the need to voice issues of sexual and gender-based violence in times of conflict and promote the equal participation of women in conflict resolution. Equality and inclusivity are key factors of a sustainable society; if in times of conflict when a society is exposed to new ideas, promoting gender equality and women empowerment can lead to the beginning of a sustainable future. The resolution provides insight to delegates on the complex framework of conflict prevention, resolution, and gender equality.

United Nations, World Health Organization. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence* [Report]. Retrieved 21 August 2015 from: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf

This report provides delegates with strong background knowledge of the conceptual framework and methodology surrounding sexual violence and sexual and gender-based violence in both partner and non-partner relationships. The report gives key examples that these types of violence

can have on sexual and reproductive health, but is limited in its recommendations. The report concludes by displaying the link between sexual and gender-based violence and its effect on specific types of sexual and reproductive health indicators.

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II. Furthering Women’s Participation in and Access to Information and Communication Technologies

“Until the ICT policy arena is itself engendered, it will be difficult to improve access for women and girls to the revolutionary tools of information and communication technology.”¹⁸³

Introduction

As technology advances and the international community continues to work toward eliminating gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting gender equality, it is important to consider how women can break the gender barrier in the world of information and communication technology (ICT).¹⁸⁴ ICT access for women and girls is important because it promotes sustainable development and gender equality, particularly through grassroots programs that serve women’s needs on a local level.¹⁸⁵ The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the *Beijing Platform for Action* (BPfA) are active agendas and conferences that play a significant role in this issue, in coordination with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).¹⁸⁶

ICTs can be defined as any technological tool or media device that advances the lives of those who use it, which includes computers, tablets, cellular devices, radios, and televisions.¹⁸⁷ When women are given ICT access and training, it reduces the communication gender gap and further invites women to participate in their communities and public and government institutions.¹⁸⁸ However, there is currently inequity in access to ICT; globally, men are twice as likely as women to have access to the internet, with the access gap reaching 45% in parts of sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁸⁹ Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to “achieve gender equality for all women and girls” and states in Target 5.b the aspiration to empower women by encouraging technological use and enhancement of specific ICTs.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, when the ICT gender gap closes and women are able to participate in their communities, their communities are more successful.¹⁹¹ However, women struggle to gain access to multiple facets of ICT, including technology during a natural disaster and access to proper education, and may even experience GBV when they do gain access to ICT.¹⁹² For example, many women and girls experience cyber-bullying on the Internet.¹⁹³ Additionally, in Africa, less than 3% of engineering positions are held by women, and many women are encouraged to not seek higher education.¹⁹⁴ Training and proper communication with Member State governments on how they can best implement the resources and education systems necessary for women to receive training, access to higher education, and careers in ICT is highly important.¹⁹⁵ It is also critical to emphasize the role of civil society organizations (CSO) and grassroots programs as partners with the UN on this issue.¹⁹⁶

International and Regional Framework

In 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) established that all persons have basic human rights.¹⁹⁷ The UDHR’s goal of using universal and gender-neutral language, as recommended by CSW, was to ensure there is no question of who has access to these rights.¹⁹⁸ The preamble of the UDHR states, “[T]he peoples of

¹⁸³ Hafkin, *Gender Issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview*, 2002.

¹⁸⁴ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ UN ECOSOC, *Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 Development Agenda*, 2015, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ WWF & SIDA, *ICTs for Empowerment of Women and Girls: A research and policy advocacy initiative on empowering women on and through the web in 10 countries*, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015.

¹⁸⁹ Sow, *Women and ICT in Africa: A New Digital Gap*, 2014.

¹⁹⁰ UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015.

¹⁹¹ WWF & SIDA, *ICTs for Empowerment of Women and Girls: A research and policy advocacy initiative on empowering women on and through the web in 10 countries*, 2014.

¹⁹² UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015.

¹⁹³ Sow, *Women and ICT in Africa: A New Digital Gap*, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Hafkin, *Gender Issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview*, 2002.

¹⁹⁵ 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, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, Preamble.

¹⁹⁸ UN Global Issues, *Women*.

the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”¹⁹⁹ These principles served as a foundation to other important UN documents, such as the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* (CPRW) (1953) and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979). The freedom to access information is the basis for women’s rights to ICT, paralleling the series of frameworks established by conventions.²⁰⁰ The initial women’s rights document, the CPRW provides a basic framework for all States Parties to agree to the specific equal rights and freedoms of women.²⁰¹ In 1979, CEDAW established clear guidelines for women to be treated equally, and the conventions continue to ensure a standard of gender equality for Member States.²⁰² Articles 10 and 16 of CEDAW focus heavily on women’s reproductive rights.²⁰³ Promoting women’s access to ICT also promotes better reproductive health education and provides women the opportunity to choose the right health options as an individual.²⁰⁴ CEDAW also firmly recommends women and their children have access to proper education and access to health information in various formats.²⁰⁵

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, and part of the conversation at the historical conference considered women’s access and use of ICT.²⁰⁶ The resulting BPfA defined a sustainable world for women in all areas, such as reproductive health, government participation, and eliminating GBV.²⁰⁷ The BPfA recognizes the daily use of technology, the quickly progressing technological advancements necessary for gender equality, and the importance of providing access to women in developing countries.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, women’s access and ICT training is recognized as a human right in a large scale under the UDHR and is addressed specifically in Annex I, point 35 of the BPfA.²⁰⁹ According to that document, technology and science can only move forward if women are treated equally and given the same ability to make decisions in mass media, as well as eliminating stereotypes.²¹⁰ Developing countries are also discussed, underlining the need to ensure women’s access to technology globally and the information needed to start promoting ICT at an early age to establish gender equality and women’s leadership.²¹¹

The recently adopted SDGs, following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), extend beyond the current global issues faced by women and look to create a world in which women of this current and of future generations can be empowered.²¹² Target 3 of the MDGs was to address gender equality and the empowerment of women.²¹³ Goal 5 of the SDGs is solely dedicated to creating an equal world and empowering all women and girls, with the consideration that women can be educated and trained to use ICT to “serve as agents of change.”²¹⁴ Goal 5 includes targets drawn from women-focused UN documents to highlight the progress that still needs to be made to eliminate gender violence, promote reproductive health education, give access to ICT, and ensure a gender-equal world.²¹⁵

¹⁹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, Preamble.

²⁰⁰ UN Global Issues, *Women*.

²⁰¹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women (A/RES/640 (VII))*, 1953.

²⁰² UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979, Preamble.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, Art. 10 & 16.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Art. 14.

²⁰⁵ Center for Reproductive Rights, *The Human Right to Information on Sexual and Reproductive Health – Government Duties to Ensure Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2008, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995, p. 13.

²⁰⁷ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹² UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015, p. 96.

²¹³ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2)*, 2000.

²¹⁴ UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015, p. 71.

²¹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

Role of the International System

CSW meets regularly to discuss specific issues women are facing.²¹⁶ It has been successful in ensuring that language in conventions, mandates, and declarations is inclusive and gender-neutral, which has been an important step in addressing gender inequality.²¹⁷ The 47th annual session of CSW (2003) focused on ICT with the goal of promoting women's participation in government, such as having political leadership opportunities and running for office.²¹⁸ The 47th session further highlighted the importance of gender equality in relation to access to ICT.²¹⁹ The 55th annual session of CSW (2011) identified ways in which women and girls could utilize technology in order to achieve equality and combat poverty.²²⁰ Culture-specific education for ICT training and media awareness was a key aspect of the session to identify groups of women and their regional needs, which led to the 55th session's primary goal of creating an inclusive environment for ICT training by eliminating stereotypes and ensuring teachers and education materials are gender-sensitive.²²¹ The 55th session also discussed women and ICT-use in partnership with UN-Women and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) recognized by CSW as able to assist women with empowerment and promoting peace, including OneVoice and Peace Women.²²² CSW also works in collaboration with the Global Advisory Group, which involves 25 CSOs, including grassroots and local government-based programs.²²³ Including these CSOs creates transparency and streamlines ideas and concepts to be highlighted during CSW sessions and to be utilized under UN-Women.²²⁴ The 58th session of CSW (2015) recognized the unfinished task of the MDGs, but looked to the future as progress will continue to be made, and highlighted the necessary task of including women in government, media, and education access in a safe environment free from violence.²²⁵

In 2000, the 23rd General Assembly (GA) Special Session, known as Beijing+5, was held by the GA with CSW acting as the preparatory body alongside the UN Division on the Advancement of Women (DAW).²²⁶ The work of the special session was then reported to ECOSOC for a follow-up.²²⁷ CSW regularly makes contributions to gender-specific aspects of the GA and had assisted in shaping the gender-specific components of the MDGs and SDGs.²²⁸ Additionally, GA resolution 68/167 (2014) draws attention to the growing role of technology in everyday life and makes strong recommendations for privacy in the digital age by recognizing the importance of "the global and open nature of the Internet and the rapid advancement in information and communications technologies as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development in its various forms."²²⁹

UN-Women works to implement many of the ideas discussed by CSW.²³⁰ For example, it worked with the government of Nepal on Nepal's Action Plan to train women on ICT to assist in the event of a natural disaster.²³¹ Peer training on ICT use and bridging the gap between Palestinian and Israeli women are also themes of the collaborative relationship between UN-Women and CSW, with the aim of achieving goals and implementing ICT training methods through NGOs and grassroots programs.²³² UN-Women further coordinates with other UN bodies such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization

²¹⁶ UN-Women, *A Brief History of the CSW*.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ 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.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²²⁰ UN CSW, *Commission on the Status of Women to Promote Women's and Girls' Access to Education, Training, Science, and Technology*, 2011, pp. 2-3.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Peace Women, *CSW55*, 2011.

²²³ UN-Women, *Civil Society Advisory Groups*.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women Report on the 58th Session (E/2014/27)*, 2014.

²²⁶ UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Five-year Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing + 5) held in the General Assembly, 5-9 June 2000*, 2000.

²²⁷ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ UN General Assembly, *The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (A/RES/68/167)*, 2014.

²³⁰ UN-Women, *About UN-Women*.

²³¹ Peace Women, *CSW55*, 2011.

²³² *Ibid.*

(UNESCO) to coordinate with Member States on protecting women and girls, as well as giving them the opportunity to receive ICT training and employment in the ICT sector.²³³

The Status of Women and ICTs

ICT can be linked to numerous aspects of gender equality, including education, sexual and reproductive health, and sustainable development.²³⁴ If programs can be properly integrated with fair access, the world will continue to change and develop.²³⁵ One concern is the growing technological advancement gap between developed and developing countries, which also means that women living in developing countries face a lack of access to ICT.²³⁶ CSW has furthered noted that the access is substantially different for women living in rural environments, grassroots, small island developing states, and war-torn areas.²³⁷ Additionally, women may be sexually exploited through the media.²³⁸ Giving priority for women’s access and protection while using ICTs is one of the solutions for achieving sustainable development, policy implementation, and alleviating poverty for the future of the international community.²³⁹

In one effort to emphasize the importance of girls and ICTs, 23 April is the official International Girls in ICTs Day, celebrating progress toward including more women and girls in the use of ICT.²⁴⁰ There is effective work being done in developing countries in Africa to target girls in slums and train them specifically in ICT access and use.²⁴¹ This opportunity teaches girls necessary skills for jobs in the ICT industry and prepares them to further their education and have a successful career.²⁴² It is important to involve girls and women in ICT training for the future success of a Member State and the international community in empowering women and girls.²⁴³

The Link Between ICTs and Gender Equality

Access to ICTs is an important aspect of achieving global gender equality. Access to affordable ICT can provide help to women who own small businesses or strive to start their own businesses, raising job accessibility and the opportunity for businesses to grow.²⁴⁴ A woman’s social standing can also be affected by her ICT access, since communication may alter the way a person is viewed.²⁴⁵ From the perspective of a local government, communication and best-practice sharing methods help to streamline methods that work to eliminate gender inequality and successfully provide ICT access to women and girls.²⁴⁶ UN-Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcukah has also highlighted the importance of establishing accessible education for women and girls.²⁴⁷ Women’s access to ICT establishes the groundwork for a world without poverty by promoting the economic success of women and their children.²⁴⁸

According to the 2008 ECOSOC report “Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women,” less than five percent of young women in Palestine were working in 2006, and among the employed women, one in three were working in the housekeeping sector.²⁴⁹ In part due to the lack of employment and extreme poverty, women’s lives were at a

²³³ Peace Women, *CSW55*, 2011.

²³⁴ 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, p. 33.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ UN General Assembly, *Information and Communications Technologies for Development (A/Res/69/2014)*, 2014.

²³⁷ 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.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Sambira, *Girls in ICT: Technology Lifting Thousands out of Poverty*, 2015.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ 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.

²⁴⁵ WWF & SIDA, *ICTs for Empowerment of Women and Girls: A research and policy advocacy initiative on empowering women on and through the web in 10 countries*, 2014, p. 9.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁴⁷ UN-Women, *ICT as a powerful means to advance women’s rights, empowerment and gender equality*, 2013

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ UN ECOSOC, *Situation of and assistance to Palestinian Women (E/CN.6/2008/6)*, 2007.

great risk for violence and death.²⁵⁰ The occupied Palestinian territories' (oPt) right to access education was severely hindered by violence and human rights violations; young women were unable to attend school or access clubs, and were being forced into marriage.²⁵¹ In order to combat the lack of access to education for young women and girls, UN-Women partnered with the World Bank, UNESCO, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) on the Joint Programme for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education, which established education focused on skills for high-paying jobs that require technological and science training and eliminating gender-based discrimination along with leadership and financial management programs.²⁵² The World Bank also funded UN-Women's program to educate women on Internet use, online communication in rural communities, and the ability to process data.²⁵³ Another good case study includes partner NGO Uganda Media Women's Association, which was recognized as a running a successful program for the involvement of women in the media in developing Member States.²⁵⁴

The use of media can be beneficial or detrimental when considering women's equality.²⁵⁵ A person's access to ICT is connected to how communities receive an understanding of how the media influences their opinions and decisions.²⁵⁶ UN-Women reports that while often unrecognized, "only one in four people heard or read about in news are women."²⁵⁷ The BPfA is an important component to ensuring that women have fair access to working in the media, as well as having access to media without having to worry about being cyber-bullied, harassed, or sexualized.²⁵⁸ The 47th annual session of CSW (2003) identified media as a necessary tool for bringing women to the forefront of society and a contributor to the advancement of women.²⁵⁹ When using the media as a tool to promote gender equality, it is important to establish clear guidelines for transparency to appropriately utilize the media in an effective and safe manner.²⁶⁰

Case Study: Palestinian Women and the Sabaya Programme

The 55th CSW session on the theme "Technology & Peacebuilding: Bridging the Israel Palestine Divide" (2011) highlighted concern for the occupation of the Palestinian territory, home demolition, and the detrimental effects of violence on women.²⁶¹ The empowerment of rural women is an important issue when considering the different aspects of the role ICT can play in gender equality. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), now a part of CSW, established the Sabaya Programme in Palestine to establish centers to give ICT access to women while also protecting their human rights.²⁶² The Sabaya Programme is acknowledged as successful in giving women the opportunity to seek leadership roles and eliminate gender inequality with the implementation, access, and use of ICT.²⁶³ Its goal was to promote women's participation in government by teaching ICT skills for social media, finance, and education, and encouraging women to participate in policy and decision-making in the public institutions.²⁶⁴ The program spread throughout different areas of the oPt, with 15 centers providing access to over 25,000 women.²⁶⁵ As part of the Sabaya Programme, goals were established to ensure that UNIFEM was utilizing all forms of networking through ICT and therefore creating best practice methods for future programs.²⁶⁶ Partnerships and grassroots programs were evaluated and utilized to provide beginner, intermediate, and advanced courses for women in oPt, with the goal of allowing the program to grow and become mobile for women who could not reach

²⁵⁰ UN ECOSOC, *Situation of and assistance to Palestinian Women (E/CN.6/2008/6)*, 2007.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² UN-Women, *UN-Women's Work on Education*, 2015.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Situation of and assistance to Palestinian Women (E/CN.6/2008/6)*, 2007.

²⁵⁵ UN DAW, *Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women through ICT*, 2005, p. 13.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ UN-Women, *The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20: Women and the Media*.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ 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, p. 1.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Peace Women, *CSW55*, 2011.

²⁶² UN-Women, *Evaluation Report: UNIFEM Occupied Palestinian Territory Sabaya Programme*, 2010.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the centers via peer education.²⁶⁷ Also, by using media and advertisement, certain communities were targeted to create awareness of the benefits of the program, and how this could positively affect their own community.²⁶⁸ The success of the leadership and advocacy programs were measured by asking the women if their self-confidence had improved, if they felt more empowered by speaking up for their rights, and if they felt confident to take a leadership role.²⁶⁹ Providing women with ICT training increased participant's self-confidence by 97%.²⁷⁰ Additionally, 98% of the participants supported the program and encouraged its continuation.²⁷¹

The sustainability of the Sabaya centers has been promoted through the use of peer training at the Relief-International Schools Online, with a focus on rural women's needs in oPt.²⁷² The women were also encouraged to keep a blog and write stories about their experiences with the program, and a web portal was created so they could share their stories and ideas with each other and show other women how the Sabaya Programme was run.²⁷³ The fact that the younger women were more likely to utilize the tool on a regular basis creates sustainability for future Sabaya generations.²⁷⁴ The centers provided women with the best experience and education by enhancing their capacity to react to conflicts, and by including them in local and state government decision and policymaking process.²⁷⁵ The centers also aimed to ensure access to technology by streamlining providers and access to user-friendly technology, to provide peer teaching programs in a friendly learning environment, and to promote women's empowerment through access and training that had concrete goals, longevity, and sustainability.²⁷⁶ One of the biggest changes in the surrounding communities was women working in the ICT sector; many participants are now working in successful ICT careers because they had access to gender-specific programs in their community that encouraged them to do so.²⁷⁷

Conclusion

ICTs are tools that can be used to benefit individuals, but should not be limited to those who can easily access ICT, or have the current knowledge to use ICT effectively.²⁷⁸ Further routes need to be examined so women have equal opportunity to access ICT.²⁷⁹ The research is clear; there is a direct correlation between the empowerment of women and the ability of Member States to achieve sustainable development.²⁸⁰ The Global Sustainable Development Report estimates that if women have equal access to ICT and related resources, upwards of 150 million people could be lifted out of poverty.²⁸¹ ICT access could potentially bridge the gap between conflict-affected Member States and regions.²⁸² Furthermore, proper access to ICT gives women employment opportunities.²⁸³ Finally, in order to eliminate GBV, ICT can be used as a modern tool to combat acts of violence and keep women safe.²⁸⁴ By promoting women's access to ICTs, the world will be a better place to live for future generations where women and men can work together equally.²⁸⁵

Further Research

Delegates should consider the following questions in their research: As Member States look to achieving the SDGs, what specific roles do ICT have in ensuring gender equality is achieved? How can ICT be used as a tool to eliminate

²⁶⁷ UN-Women, *Evaluation Report: UNIFEM Occupied Palestinian Territory Sabaya Programme*, 2010.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ UN-Women, *UN Women in Palestine Newsletter (Issue 10)*, 2014.

²⁷⁸ UN DESA, *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2015, p. 96.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ UN-Women, *ICT as a powerful means to advance women's rights, empowerment and gender equality*, 2013.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*



and prevent gender-based violence? How can ICT be used as a tool in the media to combat cyber violence and the involuntary sexualization of women? How can ICT be marketed in developing countries in a way that will encourage women to utilize local resources? What does access to social media mean for the future of gender equality? What are the best ways to provide women with ICT training and job access? How can women use peer education to provide further education and access to ICT?

Annotated Bibliography

Hafkin, N. (2002). *Gender Issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview (EGM/ICT/2002/EP.1)* [Report]. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. Retrieved 21 October 2015 from:

<http://www.willowwilliamson.com/CommPolicy/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Paper-NHafkin.1.pdf>

This paper is an overview of gender issues and how they relate to ICT. It is extremely helpful because the author highlights issues with providing access to ICT to women in developing countries. It also reflects on the history of ICT and how much time it will take to equalize access to ICT. It will allow delegates to understand a broad range of issues related to gender equality and access to ICT. There are also many helpful tables that discuss specific ICT issues and how they relate to gender issues; for example, Table 1 highlights gender aspects of ICT policy issues.

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2003). *Participation in and Access of Women to the Media, and Information and Communication Technologies and their Impact on and use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women* [Report]. Retrieved 21 October 2015 from:

http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/47/csw47_e_final.pdf

This report by CSW notes how women's access to ICT is pertinent and urges intergovernmental organizations to eliminate gender-specific treatment, as well as promoting the use of non-governmental organizations to train women on ICT use. The report also recommends the private sector as an important part of providing the technology necessary to give women access to media and information. The report additionally calls for action to ensure that ICT access reflects the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by ensuring freedom of speech and protecting women and girls from being sexually exploited in the media.

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2014). *Commission on the Status of Women Report on the 58th Session (E/2014/27)*. Retrieved 15 August 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/E/2014/27>

The 58th annual session of CSW had specific themes on the empowerment of women and their human rights, in direct relation to access to ICT and health information. This session also highlights the post-2015 development agenda, leading into the SDGs, for further review on the importance of empowering women. It further supports the assistance of Palestinian women and their right to education. This document highlights for delegates important aspects of the case study of ICT for Palestinian women, as well as highlighting other areas of importance for ensuring women are treated equally in all parts of the world.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015). *Global Sustainable Development Report*. Retrieved 20 August 2015 from:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1758GSDR%202015%20Advance%20Unedited%20Version.pdf>

Following the completion of the MDGs, SDG 5 of promoting gender equality is a key aspect in moving toward a better world. It is evident that delegates should use this resource as an example of how women can be a part of ICT and further develop access and awareness for gender equality. It also highlights the detriments of a world without women having access to ICT, especially during natural disasters. Section 7 of the report provides specific information on women who are affected in developing countries, especially when natural disasters occur, indicating the need for ICT preparedness measures.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (n.d.). *The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20: Women in Media* [Website]. Retrieved 20 August 2015 from: <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/media>

This website provides quick facts and statistics for women in the media, including advertisements, news, and radio, to provide an immediate understanding of the vast gender gap that is still happening in the world. The article also touches on online gender-based inequality as an issue that is not addressed enough. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is of noted importance as it calls on Member States to utilize the media as a resource to educate individuals on advancement for women. This article is important for a general understanding of current issues facing women in media.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2010). *Evaluation Report: UNIFEM Occupied Palestinian Territory Sabaya Programme*. Retrieved 20 August 2015 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/media/publications/en/optsabayareporten.pdf>

This report evaluates the problems and successes of the Sabaya Programme. It seeks to be a sustainable program by using the younger generation of women to educate future generations, but also by providing older women with the access they need to be independent and eliminate the gender gap. They found difficulties in encouraging older women to utilize the web resources, but were encouraged by the overall success and positive statistics of growing self-confidence for women across the board. Delegates should read through this resource for further comprehension of the case study on the Sabaya Programme.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2013, September 20). *ICT as a powerful means to advance women's rights, empowerment and gender equality* [Speech]. Retrieved 21 August 2015 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/9/ed-speech-to-broadband-gender-group>
UN-Women Executive Director

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka addressed the Broadband Commission group to discuss gender issues in relation to Internet access. While she applauds internet companies for targeting gender equality as an issue, she reminds them that closing the gender gap means more than just giving women access to internet. She tells the Broadband Commission that closing the gender gap in the internet is a key aspect of closing the gender gap for wages, job access, and promotions. This speech hits major important points for delegates when considering the importance of access for women in the developed and developing world.

United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Retrieved 24 October 2015 from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20>

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a key document for this topic. While the BPfA covers a wide-range of topics, Member States commit to encourage gender equality by providing access to ICT with a specific focus on media and eliminating stereotypes. Through the use of ICT and international access to market resources and grassroots programs, understanding the use of ICT is a primary way to grow a business effectively and work with customers and clients. This is an important aspect of Member States sharing their commitment to the BPfA and educating the international community on how to eliminate gender-based violence and promote gender equality. This document is a key resource for delegates to understand the full realm of gender equality in the international community and understand benchmarks and best practice methods in relation to the topic.

United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-eighth session. (2013). *The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (A/RES/68/167)* [Resolution]. Adopted on the report of the Third Committee (A/68/456/Add.2). Retrieved 20 August 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/68/167>

While this document does not specifically address women and ICT, it does provide a specific outline for the overall human right for privacy and protection. It should be a key document when considering protection measures related to ICT use. The document highlights that it is a basic human right to have freedom to access the Internet as well as speak through the Internet, but also protects individuals from government interference. Delegates should remember transparency is a key measure for governments to utilize for their citizens and the relationship between Member States.

United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-ninth session. (2014). *Information and Communications Technologies for Development (A/RES/69/204)* [Resolution]. Retrieved 20 July 2015 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/69/204>

As one of the most recent GA resolutions on information and communication technology, it focuses on the gender gap and the specific need for internet access in order to promote development in rural areas. It also highlights the success of the World Summit on the Information Society, and the importance of ICT for sustainable development, especially for grassroots programs and business developed by women. The resolution looks at future agendas such as the 2020 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development. Delegates should consider this

document as critical for sustainable development and successful ICT best practice sharing and capacity building.

World Wide Web Foundation & Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. (2014). ICTs for Empowerment of Women and Girls: A research and policy advocacy initiative on empowering women on and through the web in 10 countries. Retrieved 23 August 2015 from: <http://webfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/WROProjectFramework.pdf>

This is a study based on Hafkin's paper. It discusses issues such as gender-based internet violence, government roles in providing ICT access, and women's roles in demanding equality. It also touches on the unique issue of social media and how it may affect a person's social standing within their community and how they promote their business. This study provides delegates introductory research on this issue; this study will help delegates ask necessary questions when writing their position papers and expand upon their assigned Member State's policy.

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III. Women's Empowerment and the Link to Sustainable Development

“To be effective, policy actions for sustainability must redress the disproportionate impact on women and girls of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses.”²⁸⁶

Introduction

Defined as the form of development which will allow communities to fulfill their actual needs while giving future generations the same opportunity, sustainable development takes into account three main dimensions: environmental protection, social well-being, and economic growth.²⁸⁷ In recent decades, gender equality and women's empowerment have been further integrated into international discussions as a whole, such as the International Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya (1985), the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1992), and the Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and on topics related to pressing development issues, such as environmental and climate change, food security, access to education, and building democratic and transparent institutions.²⁸⁸ However, achieving sustainable development requires ensuring the respect and efficacy of women's rights and freedoms, the recognition of their abilities and skills, and the achieving of gender equality within society.²⁸⁹ Although the topic of women's empowerment in sustainable development will be further discussed in March 2016 during the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), previous international and regional instruments have set legal foundations and principles on the issue.²⁹⁰ Additionally, UN entities and civil society organizations (CSOs) have worked in close collaboration with CSW and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the current issue by bringing forward their expertise on human rights, women's empowerment in development, gender equality in climate change, and other topics of pertinence.²⁹¹

The most recent global discussions on women's empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development started through panels and ministerial roundtables during the 59th session of CSW, which took place in March 2015.²⁹² A roundtable on women's participation in political and public life underlined the link between sustainable development and women's representation in decisional institutions.²⁹³ Another discussion emphasized the need to achieve women's economic empowerment to ensure greater gender equality, and sustainable economic and social policies.²⁹⁴ The recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further emphasizes the importance of integrating gender equality and women's rights in the efforts of achieving sustainable development.²⁹⁵ Working in close collaboration with women's organizations and using women's knowledge and capacities to shape policies and achieve sustainable development, Member States are called to integrate the gender dimension and recognize women's empowerment in their policies and programs for sustainable development.²⁹⁶

International and Regional Framework

Many international legal instruments have provided guidance to Member States about women's rights, gender equality, and measures to ensure women's empowerment and respect of rights and freedoms.²⁹⁷ General provisions are included in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948); its Article 2 recalls that all the rights of

²⁸⁶ UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, 2014, p. 7.

²⁸⁷ UN WCED, *Our Common Future*, 1987, p. 16.

²⁸⁸ UNDP, *On the Road to Sustainable Development: Promoting Gender Equality and Addressing Climate Change*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

²⁸⁹ UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, 2014, p. 7.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁹¹ UN OHCHR, *Women's rights are human rights* (HR/Pub/14/2), 2014, p. 21.

²⁹² UN-Women, *Official Meetings: Organization of the session*.

²⁹³ UN ECOSOC, *Ministerial round table: transforming politics and public life to achieve gender equality* (E/CN.6/2015/INF/3), 2015, p. 1.

²⁹⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Ministerial round table: making the economy work for women and girls* (E/CN.6/2015/INF/1), 2015, p. 1.

²⁹⁵ UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, 2014, p. 11.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the UDHR, including equality of rights and dignity (Article 1), right to freedom and security (Article 3), right to property (Article 17), and right to participate in public life (Article 21), apply to every individual without any distinction on the basis of sex or where the person's residence is located.²⁹⁸ The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979) states that States Parties should refrain from taking further discriminatory measures against women and girls, and should guarantee the full development and enjoyment of their rights.²⁹⁹ In Article 7, it is mentioned that States Parties to CEDAW have the obligation to ensure that women can vote in elections, participate in policymaking, and participate in the political and public life of their country.³⁰⁰ Other articles reiterate women's right to education (Article 10), and Member States' obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the field of work and employment.³⁰¹

The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) (1995) set 12 focus areas for Member States to ensure the protection of women's rights and to implement an agenda for women's empowerment.³⁰² The major themes of the BPfA include reducing poverty among women, increasing access to educational and training resources for women, women's economic literacy and empowerment, women's political empowerment and participation in decision-making processes, and women's participation in environmental protection.³⁰³ The BPfA has been subjected to periodic reviews in 2005, 2010, and 2015 by CSW to underline the challenges faced by Member States that effected its implementation.³⁰⁴

Adopted in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also addressed the issue of women's empowerment through Goal 3, to promote gender equality and empower women.³⁰⁵ A target used to measure the fulfillment of the goal was the reduction of the gender gap between boys and girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools.³⁰⁶ Although considered as an important pillar of women's empowerment, education was considered insufficient to measure empowerment and substantive progress on gender equality.³⁰⁷ Other MDG target indicators, without precise measurements, included political participation and representation of women through seats in decisional institutions, the ratio of literate women, and the proportion of women employed in a working field not related to the agricultural sector.³⁰⁸

The topic of women's empowerment in the discussions on sustainable development was brought forward during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).³⁰⁹ In the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to empower women as a way to achieve sustainable development.³¹⁰ The document underlined the need for Member States to adopt and implement measures included in CEDAW and in the BPfA.³¹¹ The importance of working towards women's political and economic empowerment by removing barriers that prevent the full participation of women and adapting the legislative and administrative measures is also mentioned.³¹²

Adopted on 25 September 2015, the SDGs put individuals in the center of the efforts towards achieving sustainable development by emphasizing issues such as women and girls' empowerment and rights, equal access to education, and equal access to employment.³¹³ The SDGs have dedicated Goal 5 to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.³¹⁴ Some of the targets of Goal 5 include eliminating all forms of

²⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

²⁹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979, Art. 3.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Art. 7.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Art. 10 & 11.

³⁰² UN OHCHR, *Women's rights are human rights (HR/Pub/14/2)*, 2014, pp. 13-14.

³⁰³ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

³⁰⁴ UN-Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*.

³⁰⁵ UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014, p. 4.

³⁰⁶ Millennium Project, *Goals, Targets and Indicators*, 2006.

³⁰⁷ UN OHCHR, *Women's rights are human rights (HR/Pub/14/2)*, 2014, p. 15.

³⁰⁸ Millennium Project, *Goals, Targets and Indicators*, 2006.

³⁰⁹ UN OHCHR, *Women's rights are human rights (HR/Pub/14/2)*, 2014, p. 15.

³¹⁰ UN CSD, *The future we want*, 2012, p. 2.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹³ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, p. 4.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

discrimination against women and girls, ensuring opportunities for women's leadership and political participation, and giving access to resources in order to economically empower women.³¹⁵ Other SDGs include targets that mention women's empowerment and rights, such as food security and agriculture (Targets 2.2 and 2.3), access to hygiene and health resources (Target 6.2), and making transportation and urban infrastructures safe for women (Targets 11.2 and 11.7).³¹⁶

Several regional organizations have also adopted legal instruments aiming to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, including provisions against discrimination on the basis of gender.³¹⁷ Gender equality is protected under the scope of Article 14 of the *European Convention of Human Rights* (ECHR) (1950), which is a general provision against discrimination on any status, including sex.³¹⁸ Individuals can complain to the European Court of Human Rights if they feel a State Party's government has violated one or several rights protected by the ECHR.³¹⁹ The Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the *African Charter on Human and People's Rights* (1981), which secured the prohibition of discrimination against sex (Article 2).³²⁰ This provision is reinforced with Article 18, which obligates the parties to the Charter to eliminate discrimination against women and to protect their rights as prescribed by the international legal instruments.³²¹ The *Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women* (1948), from the Organization of American States (OAS), recognized that there should be no obstacles for women to the full enjoyment of the right of vote and the right to be elected in national institutions.³²²

Role of the International System

Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development will be the priority theme for the upcoming 60th session of CSW, to be held from 14 to 24 March 2016.³²³ In the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2015/6 of 31 July 2015, adopted on the recommendation of CSW, the Commission reaffirmed its intentions to have its interests represented in the post-2015 development agenda, more precisely on the SDGs, in order to improve gender equality and women's empowerment.³²⁴ Among the thematic issues discussed during the roundtables and panels were the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, economic empowerment of women and girls, investing in gender equality, and using public institutions and decision-making processes as tools to achieve gender equality.³²⁵ In a panel discussing the lessons learned from the MDGs on gender equality and the transition to the SDGs, participants discussed priorities to ensure that the SDGs will ensure women and girl's empowerment, such as addressing gender equality as a priority for the SDGs in all its three dimensions (economic, social, and environmental), strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms for gender equality, and enabling an environment to ensure gender equality.³²⁶

As a supporter of CSW's work, UN-Women also contributed to the global discussion on women's empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda by publishing a position paper on the topic.³²⁷ The document discussed gender equality in the post-2015 process, more specifically with three target areas: the elimination of any type of violence against women and girls, increasing the access to economic, training, and health resources, and increasing women's participation in the decision-making process and women's representation in decisional institutions.³²⁸ UN-Women, along with other UN agencies and partner civil society organizations (CSO), played a crucial role in ensuring the

³¹⁵ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, p. 11.

³¹⁶ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*.

³¹⁷ UN OHCHR, *Women's rights are human rights (HR/Pub/14/2)*, 2014, pp. 7-8.

³¹⁸ CoE, *European Convention on Human Rights*, 1950, Art. 14.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Art. 34.

³²⁰ OAU, *African (Banjul) Charter on Human and People's Rights*, 1981, Art. 2.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, Art. 18.

³²² OAS, *Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women*, 1948, Art. 1.

³²³ UN-Women, *CSW60 (2016)*.

³²⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/RES/2015/6)*, 2015.

³²⁵ UN-Women, *Official Meetings: Organization of the session*.

³²⁶ UN ECOSOC, *Managing the transition from Millennium Development Goals to sustainable development goals: lessons learned for gender equality from the Millennium Development Goals and galvanizing transformative change Chair's summary (E/CN.6/2015/INF/10)*, 2015.

³²⁷ UN-Women, *A transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment: Imperatives and key components*, 2013, p. 2.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

inclusion of women's empowerment and gender equality in the SDGs.³²⁹ Other UN-Women publications addressing the issue of women's empowerment and gender equality in sustainable development are on topics such as the economic empowerment of women, leadership and political participation, social protection, and access to education.³³⁰ UN-Women also implemented the UN-Women Training Centre which provides to women, governments, and other relevant stakeholders awareness and capacity-building training on a vast range of issues, including an introductory course about gender equality, improving the care economy mechanisms, improving aid from a gender perspective, and combating violence against women and girls.³³¹

The UN General Assembly (GA) also further discussed the link between women's empowerment and sustainable development in its recent sessions.³³² In resolution 68/227 of 2013, the GA urges Member States to include gender equality and women's empowerment in their national development strategies.³³³ The resolution also encourages Member States to further develop tools such as microfinance, capacity-building, and training for economic empowerment of women.³³⁴ Another recent resolution, GA resolution 68/139 of 2013, discusses the situation of women living in rural areas and methods to empower them on the political and socioeconomic level.³³⁵ GA resolution 66/130 of 2012 proposes solutions to increase women participation in the political sphere and in the decision-making process.³³⁶

CSW and UN-Women have also collaborated with other UN organs and programs to reflect on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.³³⁷ For instance, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) considers gender equality essential to achieving sustainable development and as a provider for constructive change for communities.³³⁸ UNDP has implemented the Global Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative, which allows Member States to incorporate a gender component in their national development policies.³³⁹ The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) also examined the issue of equal access to land and property for women through reports and publications.³⁴⁰ According to the OHCHR, proper access to land and property are essential to ensure women's well-being, economic safety and personal security.³⁴¹ The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been a partner of UN-Women in achieving gender equality in the workplace, and by providing safe and decent work conditions for both women and men.³⁴² The ILO has also reaffirmed its commitment to SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and one of its targets, which addresses the issue of the gender pay gap.³⁴³

Finally, many CSOs are also actively involved in the global discussions of women's empowerment in the context of sustainable development.³⁴⁴ The Women's Major Group (WMG) has promoted human rights in sustainable development, more specifically women's rights and empowerment.³⁴⁵ Created during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, WMG has participated in UN events and conferences and has advocated for the participation of women in UN policies on sustainable development and the environment.³⁴⁶ Rede de Desenvolvimento Humano, a Brazilian CSO promoting human rights, gender equality, and cultural diversity in a perspective of sustainable development and environment conservation, has also collaborated with women's organizations to ensure the respect

³²⁹ UN-Women, *Contributions to the post-2015 development agenda*.

³³⁰ UN-Women, *Publications*.

³³¹ UN-Women, *UN-Women Training Centre Annual Report 2014, 2015*, p. 20.

³³² UN General Assembly, *Resolutions*.

³³³ UN General Assembly, *Women in development (A/RES/68/227)*, 2013.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/RES/68/139)*, 2013.

³³⁶ UN General Assembly, *Women and political participation (A/RES/66/130)*, 2012.

³³⁷ UNDP, *On the Road to Sustainable Development: Promoting Gender Equality and Addressing Climate Change*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

³³⁸ UNDP, *Gender Equality*.

³³⁹ UNDP, *Global Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative*.

³⁴⁰ UN OHCHR, *Women and land, property and housing*.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² ILO, *Gender Equality*.

³⁴³ ILO, *The 2030 development agenda*.

³⁴⁴ UNDP, *On the Road to Sustainable Development: Promoting Gender Equality and Addressing Climate Change*, 2015, p. 2.

³⁴⁵ Women's Major Group, *Who we are*.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

of human rights and diversity in sustainable development.³⁴⁷ The Global Gender and Climate Alliance constitutes another example of an organization that has worked to ensure gender equality through climate change policies by providing training and capacity-building.³⁴⁸ Therefore, CSOs, in coordination with the UN-Women Civil Society Advisory Group, provide local and regional perspectives to the UN on issues affecting women throughout the world.³⁴⁹ Some organizations also played a major role in the post-2015 development agenda process by recalling the importance of including women's empowerment and gender equality in the SDGs.³⁵⁰

Women's Empowerment as a Means to Sustainable Development

As previously discussed, MDG 3 was targeted towards women's empowerment, and one form of measurement was the proportion of seats in national political institutions held by women.³⁵¹ Progress occurred in some regions of the world, but the global picture shows a low proportion of women represented; globally, only 20% of parliamentary seats are held by women.³⁵² Other targets, including access to education and employment, also saw some increase in gender parity but did not reach equality.³⁵³ Persistence of gender inequalities is not favorable to poverty reduction or economic growth, and could even lead to social tensions and conflicts.³⁵⁴ For instance, the lack of consideration given to human resources by governments can negatively impact women's empowerment and sustainable economic growth because it does not recognize the burden of unpaid and non-market related work done by women, including domestic work and childcare.³⁵⁵ For a society to be considered sustainable, unpaid work should be acknowledged, and redistributive measures could be implemented to provide social support for women acting as primary caregivers in their households.³⁵⁶

Sustainable development, mainly in its social dimension, aims to reduce inequalities by making sure that respect for human rights are at the center of Member States' policies.³⁵⁷ Therefore, achieving sustainable development will require initiatives and policies from the Member States, but also from local institutions, CSOs, and private corporations.³⁵⁸ In order to accomplish this objective, giving a voice to minorities and marginalized groups is essential.³⁵⁹ Other suggestions for making policies more sustainable include avoiding stereotypical gender assumptions about men and women's relationships with their environment; examining closely women's right for labor, property, and decision-making; and ensuring women's access to educational resources and effective participation in decision-making processes.³⁶⁰ In order to achieve sustainable development in regards to gender equality, some Member States have made available deliberations spaces, mechanisms, and forums to allow women to put forward gender-specific topics in the discussion agenda and make suggestions for actions that meet the three criteria of sustainable development.³⁶¹

Increasing Women's Participation in Politics and Decision-Making Processes

Achieving gender equality in sustainable development can be done through solid, transparent, and democratic deliberation spaces.³⁶² Women's voices and participation in policy-making processes is essential in order to ensure justice and equality.³⁶³ Target 5.5 of the SDGs emphasizes the need to ensure women's full participation and

³⁴⁷ Rede de Desenvolvimento Humano, *Who we are*.

³⁴⁸ Global Gender and Climate Alliance, *Our Primary Goal*.

³⁴⁹ UN-Women, *Contributions to the post-2015 development agenda*.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014, p. 4.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014.

³⁵⁴ UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, 2014, p. 27.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

leadership in political, economic, and public life in order to achieve women's empowerment.³⁶⁴ SDG 5 also recommends in target 5.c to strengthen national policies and legislation concerning gender equality and women's empowerment.³⁶⁵

In its report on the progress of the MDGs through a gender perspective, UN-Women recalled the recent progress in women's political representation, but also underlined that women remain under-represented in decision-making processes and decisional institutions in both the public and private sectors.³⁶⁶ Several factors can explain this issue, notably the capacity gaps between men and women, as women are less likely to have the same education than men, and the disparity in the number of contacts and resources to access leadership position.³⁶⁷ During its 59th session, CSW held a ministerial roundtable on the role of politics in achieving gender equality.³⁶⁸ Solutions discussed included temporary incentive measures such as quotas to increase women's opportunities for leadership position in the public and private sector, and education and capacity-building for women.³⁶⁹ Finally, the discussions recalled the importance of financing gender equality initiatives that encourage women to run for elected positions, and the inclusion of women's empowerment in approaching all of the SDGs.³⁷⁰

Empowering Women on the Economic Level

One of the targets of SDG 5 aims to underline the amount of women's unpaid working hours in order to improve public infrastructure and social policies, as well as an equal repartition of responsibilities in the household.³⁷¹ Generally recognized as the primary caregivers in a household, women's employment opportunities are potentially limited as they have to balance their time spent between the workplace, domestic chores, and childcare.³⁷² One of the key targets in relation to SDG 5, underlined in 5.a, encourages Member States to take reform within their own legislative systems to achieve the economic empowerment of women through access to economic resources, ownership, and financial services.³⁷³ However, reports on the MDGs show that the financial crisis of 2008 had devastating effects on employment in some regions of the world.³⁷⁴ The first MDG was dedicated to fighting against global poverty and extreme hunger, and among the targets used to measure its progress was the employment gap between men and women in different regions of the world.³⁷⁵ According to the data collected, employment gaps between the genders persist, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, and Oceania.³⁷⁶

During its 59th session, CSW addressed the issue of women's economic empowerment in a ministerial roundtable.³⁷⁷ Some of the obstacles to women's economic empowerment identified were structural barriers, which include the burden of unpaid work, the over-representation of women in low-paid jobs, the lack of feminine representation in senior management, and impediments to access of economic resources.³⁷⁸ Among the solutions discussed during the roundtable were the need for legislative and macroeconomics policies which address the issues of unpaid care work, social policies, the implementation of quotas to increase women's representation in management positions, and the protection of women's right in the workplace.³⁷⁹ Those policies can contribute to strengthening the economy, as they are promoting women's rights and are aiming for sustainable societies.³⁸⁰

³⁶⁴ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, p. 11.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014, p. 4.

³⁶⁷ UN-Women, *Women's leadership and political participation*, 2013, p. 1.

³⁶⁸ UN CSW, *Ministerial roundtable: transforming politics and public life to achieve gender equality (E/CN.6/2015/INF/3)*, 2015.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

³⁷¹ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, p. 11.

³⁷² UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014, p. 2.

³⁷³ UN OWG of the General Assembly on SDGs, *Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970)*, p. 11.

³⁷⁴ UN-Women, *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart*, 2014, p. 2.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ UN CSW, *Ministerial roundtable: making the economy work for women and girls (E/CN.6/2015/INF/1)*, 2015.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁸⁰ UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*, 2015, p. 11.

From another perspective, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), in collaboration with other organizations, has suggested an integrated approach to ensure women's economic empowerment at different levels in the corporate value chain (customers, employees, suppliers, and communities).³⁸¹ Such actions taken by corporations would ensure sustainable investment and social returns for the corporation while contributing to improve the living and working conditions of women on the global level.³⁸² The suggested actions of the ICRW include eight pillars, such as the ensuring a safe and decent work environment, increasing access to economic and educational resources, and providing social protection and childcare.³⁸³ Corporations have a crucial role to play in providing resources and training to women and by making sure women's rights are respected in the workplace.³⁸⁴ Member States can also support corporations' efforts by implementing policies to ensure women's economic empowerment, and therefore, providing societies with sustainable and positive outcomes on the political and social levels.³⁸⁵

Conclusion

Before the upcoming 60th session of CSW, during which women's empowerment in sustainable development will be further discussed, Member States met in September 2015 during the UN Sustainable Development Summit to adopt the SDGs.³⁸⁶ One of the interactive dialogues that took place during the Summit was a discussion on the theme of tackling inequalities between Member States in gender equality and women and girl's empowerment.³⁸⁷ The SDGs, especially Goal 5, provide complements to the existing legal tools to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.³⁸⁸

Issues related to the three dimensions of sustainable development (environmental protection, social wellbeing, and economic growth) and women's empowerment still need to be further discussed by the international community; aspects of these issues include women's access to educational and training resources, increasing the political participation of women, women's empowerment in the global climate change, and women's economic empowerment.³⁸⁹ The recent adoption of the SDGs, the meeting sessions of UN organs and programs, and the upcoming 60th session of CSW will contribute to the discussions on the topic, and will provide Member States with multi-dimensional solutions on women's empowerment and sustainable development in the post-2015 agenda.³⁹⁰

Further Research

While researching on the current topic, delegates should consider the following questions: How is women's empowerment related to sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda? What actions could be further taken by CSW to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the three dimensions of sustainable development? What are the current challenges faced by developed and developing Member States on women's empowerment, and how could those issues be resolved in sustainable development? How can global challenges, such as climate change, disasters and conflicts, be resolved in the context of women's empowerment in sustainable development?

³⁸¹ ICRW, *The Business Case for Women's Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach*, 2014, p. 6.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ UN CSW, *Ministerial roundtable: making the economy work for women and girls (E/CN.6/2015/INF/1)*, 2015, p. 3.

³⁸⁶ UN SDKP, *Themes of the interactive dialogues for the Summit*, 2015, p. 2.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

³⁸⁹ UN-Women, *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20 (E/CN.6/2015/3)*, 2015, p. 5.

³⁹⁰ UN-Women, *CSW60 (2016)*.

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International Center for Research on Women. (2014). *The Business Case for Women's Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach*. Retrieved 21 September 2015 from:

<http://www.icrw.org/sites/default/files/publications/The%20Business%20Case%20for%20Womens%20Economic%20Empowerment.pdf>

This document provides a clear understanding of how businesses and organizations can work together to economically empower women. It summarizes the benefits of an integrated approach of empowering women in the sustainable development process by providing such things as education and training and access to an equitable and safe workplace. It can also help delegates to better understand the role of women in the corporate value chain and see how women can be empowered on the economic level.

United Nations Development Programme. (2015). *On the Road to Sustainable Development: Promoting Gender Equality and Addressing Climate Change* [Report]. Retrieved 14 October 2015 from:

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Poverty%20Reduction/On%20the%20Road%20to%20Sustainable%20Development.pdf>

This document from the United Nations Development Programme summarizes the importance of ensuring women's and girls' participation in discussions about climate change and respecting their fundamental rights. One section of the report illustrates good case practices where women have been actively involved in sustainable development initiatives and in the decision-making process. The report gives a good overview of the current challenges women are facing and the potential solutions that could be taken to resolve the matter.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2013). *Women's Leadership and Political Participation* [Thematic Brief]. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from:

<http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20womenlghembriefuswebrev2%20pdf.ashx>

This thematic brief gives an overview of the obstacles and challenges to increasing the presence of women in leadership positions and their political participation. The document will provide delegates with a summary of solutions and actions taken by Member States and the remaining challenges on the issue. The second page of the brief gives concrete examples of success stories and completes the overview with figures and statistics. Delegates who wish to have a clear understanding of the subtopic on political women's empowerment should read this brief.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2014). *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development* [Report]. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from:

http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/unwomen_surveyreport_advance_16oct.pdf

The World Survey from UN-Women explains how achieving gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development. The second chapter of the document gives relevant facts and identifies essential international documents to better understand the topic. Other subjects discussed by the World Survey include the green economy, food security, and population and social development. These topics can provide delegates with concrete understanding on the current situation of women's empowerment and sustainable development.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *Annual Report 2014-2015*. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from:

<http://annualreport.unwomen.org/~media/annual%20report/attachments/sections/library/annual%20report%202014-2015.pdf>

The Annual Report from UN-Women gives a concise overview of the priority areas of interventions for 2014-2015. It can be a good starting point in research on the topic for delegates who would like to become more familiar with the work of UN-Women. At the end of the document, charts and maps are introduced to complement the information and show how a Member State or organization is involved with UN-Women around the world. This report will help the delegates to

further understand the mandate of UN-Women on the topic while acquiring some information about subtopics discussed in this background guide.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action turns 20 (E/CN.6/2015/3)* [Summary Report]. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from: http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/sg%20report_synthesis-en_web.pdf

This document summarizes the report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Several trends are discussed, including women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, and women and the environment. Each section provides clear understanding of the current situation, actions taken by Member States to resolve the issue, and areas for solutions. The footnotes and the sources give additional material to the information presented and allow delegates to more fully understand the topic.

United Nations Statistics Division & United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2014). *Millennium Development Goals: Gender Chart* [Report]. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/7107C11333C046D8BBD0BE6BA5FD251A.ashx>

This report should serve as a reference for any delegates who would like to understand the evolutions of the MDG objectives between 2000 and 2014. Under each goal section, a summary of the actual situation is provided. Delegates could refer to this document, especially MDGs 1 and 3, if they wish to get an overview on what has been accomplished and which challenges remain moving in to the implementation of the SDGs. The statistics and data presented in this report are focused on women and girls, and can provide with a better understanding of the roles of MDGs on women's and girls' empowerment.

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2015). *Ministerial round table: making the economy work for women and girls (E/CN.6/2015/INF/1)* [Chair's Summary]. Retrieved 24 August 2015 from: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2015/INF/1

This document summarizes the discussion on women's economic empowerment that took place during the 59th session of CSW. This summary from the Chair will provide delegates with a good understanding of the actual obstacles that prevent women to reach their full potential on the economic level. The document will also provides delegates with ideas for possible solutions to address the issue.

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. (2015). *Ministerial round table: transforming politics and public life to achieve gender equality (E/CN.6/2015/INF/3)* [Chair's Summary]. Retrieved 24 August 2015 from: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2015/INF/3

This document summarizes the ministerial roundtable discussions that took place during the 59th session of CSW. The Chair's summary of the roundtable will provide a good summary for delegates who wish to get a better understanding of the actual situation in gender equality and political representation. Each section briefly presents some areas of solutions to address the current challenges. This document constitutes a strong starting point for delegates who wish to understand issues and challenges related to women's political empowerment.

United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2014). *Women's rights are human rights (HR/Pub/14/2)* [Report]. Retrieved 15 October 2015 from: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HR-PUB-14-2.pdf>

Written with a human rights' perspective, this document from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights gives a good research foundation by summarizing recent progresses and the UN system involvement on women's rights. The report presents the different international and regional legal documents and their relevance to women's rights. A section of the report provides a good understanding of key legal concepts to understand the issues of women's rights. Delegates wishing to become more familiar with legal framework and issues should read this report.



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