



General Assembly Second Committee
Topic 2: The Role of Women in Development¹

13 October 2013

Throughout history, women have held subordinate roles in most societies. In recent decades, however, the ideological foundations of gender inequalities have been questioned, and the political, social, and economic effects of gender inequality have become better understood. Today, it is widely agreed that women “play a very crucial role in the development of society at all levels[, but]...they function from a subordinate position inherent in both traditional and state institutions.”²

To address this problem, the UN General Assembly (GA) has held four world conferences on women. The first was held in 1975 in Mexico City. The most recent was held in 1995 in Beijing, China. In 1985, at the Third UN World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi, Kenya, UN member states established the goal of “gender mainstreaming.” In 1997, the UN Economic and Social Council, which reports to the GA, defined gender mainstreaming as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.³

To promote gender equality, the GA has created a number of committees and programs. Of these, two are of primary importance. The first is the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was founded by the GA in 1946 and is the venue in which UN member states negotiate and pass resolutions about how to improve the situation of women and girls worldwide. CSW reports to the GA through ECOSOC. The CSW consists of representatives of 45 member states elected by the GA.⁴

The second main UN organization focusing on gender equality is UN Women, which was founded by the GA in July 2010. UN Women (short for UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) is the part of the UN secretariat (bureaucracy) that is dedicated to helping the CSW, ECOSOC, and GA carry out their resolutions related to women. UN Women helps UN member states uphold GA and Security Council resolutions related to women.⁵

¹ This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, Montana Model UN faculty advisor, and Jessica Lawson with contributions from Morgan Eichwald and Kedra Hildebrand. Copyright 2013 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² Lotsmart Fonjong, “Fostering Women’s Participation in Development through Non-Governmental Efforts in Cameroon,” *Geographical Journal* 167:3 (September 2001), p. 223.

³ UN General Assembly, “Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997,” Report A/52/3.18, September 1997, Chapter IV, Item IA, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-3.htm>

⁴ UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), “Commission on the Status of Women,” <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>

⁵ UN Women, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.unwomen.org/>

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Development refers to the process of improving the quality of human life in the poorest countries of the world.⁶ Development has a number of aspects – political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental – and involves a number of fields, including governance, trade, finance, foreign aid, health care, education, human rights, and the environment.

In 2000, the GA established eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to attain by 2015. Two of the goals relate directly to women. They are MDG 3 on gender equality and MDG 5 on maternal and reproductive health. The other five goals relate to women indirectly through the goal of gender mainstreaming. For example, to achieve MDG 2 on universal education, UN member states and organizations must consider the educational needs of both boys and girls. Similarly, to achieve MDG 8 on “global partnership,” developed states must consider the needs of both men and women in deciding how to allocated foreign aid.⁷

The thinking behind these gender aspects of the MDGs is that gender equality will help produce stable national economic systems that will, in turn, produce a stable international order.⁸ According to development experts, gender inequality is a significant obstacle to achieving worldwide sustainable development. Of particular concern are women and girls’ lack of access to education and health care.

History and Current Events

Although women have always played vital economic roles in the household, farm, and workplace, they have often been poorly educated, divorced from economic decision-making, and disenfranchised in civil and political realms. As a result, their ability to contribute to and benefit from economic development has been limited. Yet the role of women in child-bearing, child-rearing, and household management means that women’s inequality creates economic and health problems for the whole family, as well as for communities and nations. As a result, women’s rights are increasingly seen not only as important in themselves (because they are human rights) but also as instrumentally important (because they contribute to development).

Women’s Rights as Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was unanimously adopted by the GA on December 10, 1948. The UDHR affirms that both men and women are entitled to certain inalienable rights, including the “right to social security and...to [the] realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for...dignity and the free development of...personality.”⁹ In addition, the UDHR affirms that everyone has the right to employment and to equal pay for equal work.¹⁰ Moreover, both women and men are entitled to access to the instruments of social and cultural development, including education, health, scientific advancements, and the arts.¹¹

⁶ United Nations, “About Development,” <http://www.un.org/en/development/other/overview.shtml>, accessed 8 August 2010.

⁷ United Nations, “End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals,” <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>, accessed 16 January 2010.

⁸ United Nations, “About Development.”

⁹ UN General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1948, Article 22, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, accessed 6 January 2010.

¹⁰ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Article 23.

¹¹ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Articles 25-27.

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As a GA resolution, the UDHR is a non-binding recommendation to UN member states. In the 1970s, states that wished to make more binding commitments to the principles outlined in the UDHR drafted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Each of these treaties addresses the human rights of women, both in development and in other spheres of life.

For example, Article 3 of the ICCPR mandates that states party to the Covenant “undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth.”¹² Guarantees mandated by the Covenant include the rights to physical integrity, liberty and security of person, procedural fairness, individual liberties, political rights, freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment, and non-discrimination. As of today, 167 of the UN’s 192 member states have ratified and therefore become party to this treaty.¹³

Similarly, the ICESCR guarantees to all individuals the right to just and favorable conditions of work, to form and join trade unions, to social security, to the widest possible protection for families, especially in promoting maternal health, to an adequate standard of living, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to education, and to take part in cultural life.¹⁴ Today, 160 states have ratified this treaty.¹⁵

In 1975, at the First World Conference on the Status of Women, states began to negotiate the first international treaty to specifically address the rights of women. The result of their negotiations was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the GA in 1979 and opened for signature in 1980. CEDAW clarifies what constitutes discrimination against women and calls for the establishment of national programs to eliminate such bias. CEDAW defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women...of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”¹⁶

States that ratify CEDAW agree to report at least every four years on the status of their efforts to comply with the treaty. Country reports are reviewed by the CEDAW Committee, which consists of 23 women’s rights experts from around the world. State parties also have the option to agree that individuals and groups can submit complaints to the CEDAW Committee about women’s rights abuses in their countries.¹⁷

As of today, 187 states have ratified CEDAW. Among those that have not done so are Sudan, Somalia, Iran, and the United States. President Carter signed the treaty in 1980, but the Senate has never ratified it, due largely to opposition to Article 12, in which state parties agree to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women,

¹² “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” 1966, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>

¹³ For ratifications, see UN Treaty Collection, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en

¹⁴ “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 1966, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

¹⁵ For ratifications, see UN Treaty Collection, “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&lang=en

¹⁶ “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” 1979, Article 1, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

¹⁷ Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,” <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/index.htm> For country reports, go to OHCHR, “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – Sessions,” <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/sessions.htm>. Search for your country’s name, and open the English (E) version of its most recent report.

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access to health care services, including those related to family planning.” According to a 2009 letter from the National Right to Life Committee to members of the Senate,

Since about 1995, Article 12 and other provisions have been creatively interpreted by official bodies, ranging from the European Parliament to the U.N. CEDAW Committee, to condemn limitations on abortion, on grounds that any restrictions on abortion are per se discrimination against women.¹⁸

Proponents of CEDAW, by contrast, argue that CEDAW leaves the details of domestic legislation establishing gender equality up to state parties.¹⁹

Lack of universal participation in CEDAW is not the only obstacle to gender equality. As is frequently the case in international law, many states that have ratified CEDAW have done so with the understanding that they will not carry out certain provisions. These understandings, which are known as “reservations,” must be articulated in writing at the time of ratification. For example, Saudi Arabia has said that, “In case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention.” In addition, Saudi Arabia has said that “The Kingdom does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2 of [A]rticle 9 of the Convention.”²⁰ This provision states that “States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.”²¹ Other states with large Muslim populations have expressed similar reservations.

Self-defined exceptions such as these are contentious. For example, Austria stated that it objects to and will ignore Saudi Arabia’s reservation “concerning any interpretation of the provisions of the Convention that is incompatible with the norms of Islamic law” because “it does not clearly specify the provisions of the Convention to which it applies.” In Austria’s view, the Convention has entered “into force in its entirety ... between Saudi Arabia and Austria.”²² Austria has probably taken this position in the hopes that by participating in CEDAW, Saudi Arabia will soften its stance on women and that, if it does not, the fact that Saudi Arabia has signed but is not in compliance with CEDAW can be used to embarrass Saudi Arabia and pressure it to change.

In September 1995, 189 UN member states attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, whose theme was “Equality, Development, and Peace.” At the end of the conference, they passed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Declaration recognized that “the status of women... advanced in some important respects in the [preceding] decade but that progress [was] uneven, inequalities between women and men... persisted, and major obstacles remain[ed], with serious consequences for the well-being of all people.”²³ In addition, the Plan for Action affirmed member state commitment to the provision of equal opportunities in 12 “critical areas of concern,” namely:

¹⁸ National Right to Life Committee, “Letter to Members of the US Senate,” 25 March 2009, <http://www.nrlc.org/federal/foreignaid/CEDAWLettertoSenate2009.html> See also Austin Ruse, “This is No Time to Go Wobbly,” *Weekly Standard*, 27 April 2009, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/396tcoin.asp>

¹⁹ Christie Edwards, “Legal Issues Regarding Ratification of CEDAW and CRC,” Thomas Jefferson School of Law, presentation, <http://www.voicesofwomen.org/docs/Ratification-CEDAW-CRC.pdf>, accessed 7 October 2010. See also Michelle Goldberg, “Hillary’s Challenge,” *The American Prospect*, 16 July 2009, http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=hillarys_challenge

²⁰ UN Treaty Collection, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.”

²¹ “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” Article 9.

²² UN Treaty Collection, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.”

²³ Fourth World Conference on Women, “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,” September 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>

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1. Women and poverty
2. Education and training of women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflict
6. Women and the economy
7. Women in power and decision-making
8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
9. Human rights of women
10. Women and the media
11. Women and the environment
12. The girl child²⁴

The Beijing Plan of Action was strongly influenced by economist Amartya Sen's 1990 article showing that more than 100 million women worldwide are "missing" (have died or were never born) as the result of a worldwide culture of inequality, which encourages or looks the other way as female babies are aborted or abandoned and that restricts the access of girls and women to health care, education, employment, and property rights.²⁵

In GA Resolution A/RES/50/203 (1995), the GA endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action and called on member states to implement it.²⁶

Women's Rights and Development

In 2000, when the GA adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), member states agreed to work together to achieve specific targets by 2015. Developing countries agreed to report each year to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on their progress toward meeting the goals, and developed countries agreed to develop trade relations and foreign aid policies that would enable developing countries to meet the targets. Two of the MDGs relate directly to women.

The goal of MDG 3 is to "Promote Gender Inequality and Empower Women." For this goal, the GA's target is to "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015."²⁷ As researcher Isobel Coleman explains, educating women and girls has positive effects for all of society:

Educated women have fewer children; provide better nutrition, health, and education to their families; experience significantly lower child mortality; and generate more income than women with little or no schooling. Investing to educate them thus creates a virtuous cycle for their community.²⁸

²⁴ United Nations, "Key Conference Outcomes: Outcomes on Gender and Equality," <http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/gender.shtml>

²⁵ Amartya Sen, "More Than 100 Million Women are Missing," *New York Review of Books* 37:20 (20 December 1990), <http://ucatlans.ucsc.edu/gender/Sen100M.html>

²⁶ UN General Assembly, "Follow-Up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and Full Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action," Resolution A/RES/50/203, 1995, <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/resolutions/50/203GA1995.html>

²⁷ United Nations, "End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals," Goal 3, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>

²⁸ Isobel Coleman, "The Payoff from Women's Rights," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

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In 2013, the UN announced that “Gender parity in primary schooling worldwide has been achieved” in all regions, though inequalities remain in sub-Saharan Africa, where about 7% of girls do not attend elementary school. Moreover, secondary and university education remain unequal, with the greatest disparities in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; there, about 23 and 36% of girls, respectively, do not attend high school or college.²⁹ Only two of the 130 developing countries covered by the MDGs have met the target at all educational levels.³⁰

A number of countries and organizations have developed innovative and effective programs for increasing the access of women and girls to education. Examples include stipends for girls to attend high school (students in many developing countries must pay to attend public school). Less progress has been made on the other MDG 3 targets. Today, just 40% of women worldwide work for pay in sectors other than agriculture, and just 20% of legislators are women.³¹

The aim of MDG 5 is to “Improve Maternal Health.” For this goal, the GA established two targets. The first target is to “Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio” (the percentage of women who die in childbirth).³² In addition to being good for women themselves, decreasing the death rate of women in childbirth insures that children have mothers to look out for their health, education, and happiness. This reduces infant mortality and childhood illness, which contribute to life-long health problems. Moreover, it means that more people are available to participate in the work of development, raising the standard of living of individuals, households, and countries.

Between 1990 and 2013, maternal mortality declined by 47 percent, to 287,000 per year. Although this is a substantial improvement, it is far short of the target of 75 percent. In addition, maternal mortality in developing countries is 15 times higher than in developed ones.³³ According to the UN, “Most maternal deaths in developing countries are preventable through adequate nutrition, proper health care, including access to family planning, the presence of a skilled birth attendant during delivery and emergency obstetric care.” Programs that have been especially successful in decreasing maternal mortality include training midwives and educating girls.³⁴

The second target of MDG 5 is to “Achieve universal access to reproductive health” so girls understand the reproductive process and therefore know how to avoid pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and so mothers and babies are healthy before, during, and after childbirth.³⁵ Decreasing the rate of teen pregnancy, stemming the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, and ensuring that women have proper medical care during childbirth and pregnancy increases the likelihood that women will have long and healthy lives and that children will have stable, prosperous homes.

²⁹ UN Department of Public Information, “Fact Sheet: Goal 3: Promote Gender Inequality and Empower Women,” September 2013, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Goal_3_fs.pdf.

³⁰ United Nations, “End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals,” Goal 3.

³¹ UN Department of Public Information, “Fact Sheet: Goal 3.”

³² United Nations, “End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals,” Goal 5, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/maternal.shtml>

³³ United Nations, “End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals,” Goal 5.

³⁴ UN Department of Public Information, “Fact Sheet: Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health,” September 2013, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Goal_5_fs.pdf

³⁵ United Nations, “End Poverty 2015: Millennium Development Goals,” Goal 5.

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Poverty, Foreign Aid and the International Financial Crisis

Gender discrimination is a complex phenomenon with deep social and cultural roots. Yet political and economic factors also prevent the full realization of the MDGs related to women in development. Here we focus on three: poverty, the failure of developed countries to meet the aid targets they promised in MDG 8, and the international financial crisis.

According to the UN, “Poverty is the main cause of unequal access to education, particularly for girls of secondary-school age. Women and girls in many parts of the world are forced to spend many hours fetching water, and girls often do not attend school because of a lack of decent sanitation facilities.”³⁶

In the Millennium Declaration (2000), UN member states called on developed countries to reduce world poverty by granting “more generous development assistance, especially to countries that are genuinely making an effort to apply their resources to poverty reduction.” At the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and the 2005 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a target of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) was established.³⁷ According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), if all developed countries spent this amount on official development assistance (ODA), there would be sufficient funds to achieve the MDGs by the target date of 2015.³⁸

For the purposes of this target, developed countries are defined as members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which includes the 30 richest countries in the world (measured in terms of GDP per capita). In 2007, before the international financial crisis began, just five of these countries (Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) met or surpassed the 0.7 percent target, and “for developed countries as a group, official development assistance was just 0.28 percent of their combined gross income.”³⁹ With the economic downturn, contributions fell and unemployment rose.⁴⁰ Despite the economic recovery and developed country commitments to meet the 0.7% target, in 2013, there is still a gap of \$174.7 billion.⁴¹

In 2010, economist Jeffrey Sachs was pessimistic about whether the MDG goal of reducing extreme poverty could be met.⁴² Today, he is optimistic:

³⁶ UN Department of Public Information, “Fact Sheet: Goal 3.”

³⁷ This target dates back to General Assembly Resolution 2626 (October 1970). UNICEF, “0.7% Background,” 2006, available at http://www.unicef.ca/portal/Secure/Community/502/WCM/HELP/take_action/G8/Point7_EN.pdf See also MDG Gap Task Force, “Official Development Assistance (ODA),” http://www.un.org/esa/policy/mdggap/mdggap_matrix_oda.html

³⁸ UNDP, “Tracking the MDGs: Global Partnership Progress,” http://www.undp.org/mdg/tracking_donorcountryreports2.shtml

³⁹ United Nations, “Millennium Development Goals Report 2008,” p. 45, http://www.undp.org/publications/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf

⁴⁰ UN Department of Public Information, “UN Takes a Stand on Global Aid, Trade and Debt Commitments, as G20 Prepares to Meet,” press release, 16 September 2009, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Press_release_MDG_Gap_2009.pdf

⁴¹ UN, “Integrated Implementation Framework: Official Development Assistance,” accessed 13 October 2013, <http://iif.un.org/?q=node/7>

⁴² Jeffrey Sachs, “Millennium Goals, Five Years to Go,” *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/18/opinion/18iht-edsachs.html?>

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The global picture will surprise doomsayers. According to the World Bank's scorecard, the proportion of households in developing countries below the extreme-poverty line (now measured as \$1.25 per person per day at international prices) has declined sharply, from 52 percent in 1980, to 43 percent in 1990, 34 percent in 1999, and 21 percent in 2010. Even sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the most recalcitrant poverty, is finally experiencing a notable decline, from 58 percent in 1999 to 49 percent in 2010.⁴³

Other observers, such as the hunger activist Frances Moore Lappe, question what they see as a "numbers game" in which states and international organizations focus on the percentage of people in poverty instead of the absolute number of people, which has changed little since 1990.⁴⁴

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

From 1946, when it created the Commission on the Status of Women, to the present, the GA has paid considerable attention to the broad goal of gender equality and the particular need for women to participate in and benefit from economic development.

One of the GA's most important recent actions came in 2008, when it passed a resolution drafted by the GA-2 entitled, "Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development." In this resolution, the GA asserted that women are essential to sustainable development and noted the effects of globalization on women. According to the resolution, UN member states are

aware that, while globalization and liberalization processes have created employment opportunities for women in many countries, they have also made some women, especially in developing countries and in particular in the least developed countries, more vulnerable to problems caused by increased economic volatility.⁴⁵

The resolution also urged member states to address women's needs across a variety of areas, from medical improvements to civil rights and employment opportunities. The resolution framed the issue as a pressing concern for the maintenance of international peace and security, arguing that "peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men and to development."⁴⁶

Also in 2008, the GA asserted in Resolution 62/206, that "gender equality is of fundamental importance for achieving sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development." In this resolution, member states noted that "investing in the development of women and girls has a multiplier effect, in particular on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth, in all sectors of the economy."⁴⁷

In July 2010, the GA founded UN Women to consolidate four previously-separate UN agencies devoted to women's issues into one. The purpose of UN Women is to provide technical support to UN member states wishing to uphold GA resolutions related to women and wishing to think of new ways to help women and girls. In addition,

⁴³ Jeffrey Sachs, "The End of Poverty, Soon," *New York Times*, 24 September 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/25/opinion/the-end-of-poverty-soon.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print

⁴⁴ Frances Moore Lappe, "Poverty Down! Inequality & Hunger Up... Huh?," *Huffington Post*, 13 September 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frances-moore-lappe/poverty-down-inequality-up_b_1878850.html

⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, "Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development," Resolution A/RES/62/205, 10 March 2008, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/resolutions.shtml>

⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, "Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development."

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, "Women in Development," Resolution A/RES/62/206, 10 March 2008, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/resolutions.shtml>

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UN Women is charged with holding member states to the standards articulated in GA and Security Council resolutions.⁴⁸ In 2013, UN Women estimated that:

If women's paid employment rates were raised to the same level as men's, the United States' gross domestic product would be an estimated 9 per cent higher, the euro zone's would climb by 13 per cent and Japan's would be boosted by 16 per cent. In 15 major developing economies, per capita income would rise by 14 per cent by 2020 and 20 per cent by 2030.⁴⁹

With the creation of UN Women, some UN member states and organizations devoted to women's rights have begun to push the GA to hold a fifth world conference on women in 2015.⁵⁰ Others are more wary. According to many women's advocates, member states' commitment to gender equality has deteriorated since the last conference was held in Beijing in 1995. Thus they worry that delegates to a fifth conference on women would re-open debate on the desirability of the 12 goals in the Beijing Platform of Action instead of focusing on how best to achieve them.⁵¹

Conclusions

UN Women is ready to move forward on issues of gender equality. Yet, as part of the UN bureaucracy, UN Women can only on matters referred to through by the GA and Security Council, and it can only assist states when they seek its help. Given this, what initiatives should the GA develop and endorse to promote women's human rights and include women in the work and benefits of development? As you develop your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- What is the economic situation of women and girls in your country? Consider, among other things, educational attainment, mortality rates, and access to health care and employment.
- What are the rights and responsibilities of women and girls in your country? What historical, religious, cultural, and other influences do they reflect?
- Has your country ratified the ICCPR, ICESCR, and/or CEDAW? If not, why not? If so, is it in compliance with them?
- If you are representing a developing country, what has been its progress on the MDGs related to women and development? What remains to be done?
- If you are representing a developed country, how has it helped and/or hindered progress on the MDGs related to women and development? Is it meeting the aid target?
- How have women and girls in your country been affected by the economic crisis?
- Should the GA sponsor a fifth world conference on women? If so, what should its agenda be?
- How should MDGs related to the human rights and economic opportunities of women and girls be modified or expanded when they come up for review in 2015?

⁴⁸ UN Women, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.unwomen.org/>

⁴⁹ UN Women, "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

⁵⁰ "A Call to Action in Support of a United Nations Sponsored Fifth World Conference on Women," <http://5wcw.org/>, accessed 7 October 2010.

⁵¹ Lydie Err, "Promoting a United Nations 5th World Conference on Women," Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe, Document 10643, 6 July 2005, <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc05/EDOC10643.htm> See also "Fifth World Conference on Women and the 2005 CSW Review of the Beijing Platform for Action," Discussions by NGOs at the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 3-14 March 2003, <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/csw03/beijing10.pdf>

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Recommended Reading

Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff from Women's Rights." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June (2004): 1-5. Available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59896/isobel-coleman/the-payoff-from-womens-rights> and through InfoTrac High School.

This article was written before the GA's 10 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2005. It discusses the role of women in development and the accomplishments of particular countries.

"Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). 1979. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

It is important to understand CEDAW's provisions and to find out if your country has ratified it and is in compliance (see footnotes 16 and 17). To determine if your country has ratified other human rights treaties, see footnotes 13 and 15.

Grossman, Anna, et al. "Global Overview and Regional Summary." In *Beijing Betrayed*. Women's Environment and Development Organization. March 2005. Available at <http://www.wedo.org/library/media-type/pdf/beijing-betrayed-2005>

In this report, the non-profit Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) criticizes UN member states' implementation of the Beijing Declaration. Elsewhere on the site, WEDO makes suggestions for the post-2015 MDGs.

Kristof, Nicholas D. and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky*. New York: Random House, 2010. Excerpt available at <http://www.randomhouse.com/book/95840/half-the-sky-by-nicholas-d-kristof-and-sheryl-wudunn#excerpt>

This book offers vivid case studies related to the economic and other rights of women and girls in developing countries and explores issues such as prostitution and forced labor. For video clips from a related PBS documentary, go to <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/half-the-sky/>.

UN Women. "What We Do." Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>

This site provides general information, detailed reports, and policy advice about the human rights and opportunities of women and girls worldwide. Search on your country's name. See also the sources in footnotes 27, 29, 32, and 34.

"Woman Stats Project." Website. Available at <http://www.womanstats.org/>

This academic site offers a variety of data on the status of women in particular countries.

World Bank Group. "GenderStats." Available at www.worldbank.org/genderstats

This website compiles socioeconomic data on women from individual states and several international organizations.

World Economic Forum. "Global Gender Gap 2010." Available at <http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm>

This recent report ranks more than 100 countries according to gender equality in government and corporate leadership. It is an excellent source for finding out more about your country, as well as the challenges faced by women worldwide.