

Research Report

Committee: Human Rights

Topic: The Question of the Promotion of Women's Rights in the Developing World

Introduction

In recent years, there have been some key advancements for the liberties of women in the developing world however gender discrimination still remains a significant issue. Gender equality is a basic human right and its achievement can have enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women boosts developing and already thriving economies, increasing productivity and growth and having the potential to aid the development of Third World countries. However, gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society and many women still face significant discrimination in all fields of life. In many countries women lack access to decent work; facing occupational segregation and gender wage gaps; and are often denied access to basic education and health care. Women face under-representation in political and economic decision-making processes globally and many remain the victims of gender-based violence.

Definition of Key Terms:

Feminism - The advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.

Gender Equality - The state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender

Gender Gap - Disparities between women and men's condition or position in society.

Gender Pay Gap - Difference between average hourly earnings of men and women as a proportion of average hourly earnings of men's earnings

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) - Any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males

Glass Ceiling - Metaphor used to describe the barriers through which women can see elite positions, in governments or international organisations, however can not obtain them and are prevented from gaining the most prestigious jobs.

Feminisation of Poverty - The phenomena of women of more women suffering more extreme poverty than men

Discrimination - The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex

Developing World - The Third World

Decent Work - The availability of employment in conditions of freedom, equity, human security and dignity.

Decision-Making Positions - Positions in governments, legislative bodies and political parties as well as positions of leadership in areas of art, sport, culture, media, education, religion, scientific institutions and local/international organisations

Human Rights – Rights which are believed to belong to each and every person, such as the right to life, as laid out under the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Contextual Information:

For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. Despite this, over many decades the UN has made successful progress in advancing gender equality; namely in the establishment of UN Women in 2010 which has helped set global standards across UN member states for the strive for gender equality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1948 outlines, in Article 2, that: 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.' The freedom and rights expressed in the declaration include the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to education, the right to health and the right to participate and influence the development of society. However, a report by the UN in 2017 found that women globally earn a quarter less than men, with this figure being even greater in developing countries. This demonstrates the issues that remain of general gender disparities and inequalities - namely in the gender pay gap, a global problem which remains prevalent even in First World Countries (with the UK obtaining an average gender pay gap of 9% in 2018) as well as women's inferior access to decent work in the developing world. For seven years running Iceland has been world leading in gender equality with women holding 48% of governmental positions. The Icelandic government hopes to close their gender pay gap by 2022, following the institution of the 'Equal Pay law', however a study by the UN estimated that it will take 70 years for the global gender gap to be alleviated. Some of the worst countries globally for gender equality are those who enforce strict religious policies, such as Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. In Saudi Arabia some of the strictest interpretations of Sharia Law are practiced, which is enforced by the nation's religious police force. As a result, women are considered minors who belong to their male guardians and therefore are not allowed to leave the house without them. However, in 2015 women

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were granted the right to vote in an election for the first time and in 2018 were granted the ability to drive - this shows that even in the countries where women's rights are most suppressed, progress towards greater gender equality is being made.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

UN Women - United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women that supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality. UN Women works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide.

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) - Functional Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council. It is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - Department of the Secretariat which works to promote and protect the human rights that are guaranteed under international law.

UNICEF - A children's charity established by the UN General Assembly following the Second World War who integrate the importance of gender equality into all of their work and is working to support marginalised girls to pursue secondary education.

Timeline of Events:

Date:	Event:
1946	Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established
1979	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) is established: over 90% of UN members are party to this, making it the second most ratified convention (in which state obligations to eliminate discrimination are outlined)
1993	General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: complement to CEDAW in efforts to eliminate violence against women.
1995	Beijing Platform for Action (BFA): landmark document that came out of the Fourth World Conference for Women in which past progress was reviewed and new requirements outlined to accelerate the strive towards gender equality
2010	UN General Assembly created UN Women

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2012 UN System wide action plan (UN SWAP): framework to enhance accountability and measure progress towards the achievement of gender equality

2015 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: document building upon the BFA of 1995 and continuing to review progress

2015 Women in Saudi Arabia, the country with the greatest gender inequalities, were granted the right to vote in an election for the first time.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events:

- **CEDAW** - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- **BFA** - Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
- **UN SWAP** - System wide action plan (2012)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (2015)

Possible Solutions:

Despite previous progress and attempts at improving women's rights in the developing world, it's clear that difficulties still remain in achieving gender equality - primarily due to the obstacles of cultural and religious differences. Any proposed resolution to this issue would need to therefore be culturally and religiously sensitive especially when addressing many of the countries in the Middle East, who tend to have the greatest gender inequalities. Therefore arguably the promotion of Human Rights, which clearly account for the removal of discrimination and gender inequalities, would be a viable solution in tackling the issue of the global gender gap and should be of primary importance in any resolution. Additionally any resolution would need to avoid the alteration of national laws, as that would not be a realistic or feasible proposal. Action could also be directed towards the improvement of educational opportunities for girls as well as discouraging gender discrimination in the workplace. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018-2021 would be useful to reference to understand practical solutions which can be attained, primarily in countries who do not face the obstacle of religion when pursuing gender equality.

Bibliography:

UN Women information: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>

OHCHR information: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

UNICEF information: <https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality>

UNICEF Gender Action Plan:

https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/2018-2021-Gender_Action_Plan-Rev.1.pdf

