

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: The Question of Women in Power and Decision Making

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Introduction

As the result of an unabating effort from UN to improve gender rights, women are thankfully gaining more and more power. The number of job acceptances for women in fields typically viewed as male dominated (such as engineering) has increased considerably. Companies are starting to accept more women, and a few are even beginning to exhibit gender equality between employees as one of their company's positive aspects.

However, the large gap between men and women with regards to availability in decision-making, as well as general power and authority, remains a substantial concern in our world. Women are still restricted to less educational opportunities, remain a lesser percentage in political participation, and are exposed to greater safety risks.

Women empowerment will bring a significant influence on gender equality. With women empowerment comes greater acknowledgement of self-worth and decision-making power.

Factors such as stereotype plays a major role in gender inequality, because they blindfold people from viewing everyone else on equal standing. However, a clear solution has not yet been found that would effectively solve the problem.

Over the decades, women have certainly proven that they have great potential in bringing crucial influences to our society. According to Mario Osava, "When it comes to female education rates, progress has been made around the world, and in many countries girls and young women have outnumbered and outperformed boys and men at all levels of schooling for decades. Nevertheless, these advances have yet to translate into greater equity in employment, politics and social relations."

Moreover, according to the United Nations Human Rights Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo- Ngcuka, "political will, financing, accountability, attitudinal and institutional barriers, as

well as a lack of expertise continue to be obstacles” in the path towards promoting the admittance of women economically, socially and politically.

Therefore, we hope that debating on this topic will give us a great opportunity to gather and share knowledge, in order to come up with remarkable solutions to make the position of women and their power in decision-making more equal to men.

Key Terms

Women in Development (WID):

Women in Development (WID) is a national organization that aims to ensure developments in both resources and interferences that are used to advance women’s status. They are not necessarily targeting a change in hierarchical gender relations between women and men; instead, they are more focused on supporting women so that they can develop skills that will be passed on for future generations to come.

Gender-based Violence (GBV):

This is an umbrella term for committing violence based on their gender differences. This includes sexual violence (i.e. sexual abuse, forced prostitution, domestic violence, trafficking, forced early marriage) and harmful traditional practices (i.e. female genital mutilation, honour killing and widow inheritance).

Gender Gap

A disparity of opportunity and achievement between men and women on areas that include education, health, and politics.

Gender Wage Gap

Defined by the The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the “the difference between female earning expressed as percentage of male earning”. This

is important to put into consideration, since women generally have a significantly lower income than men. This is caused mainly by differences in education, position, and employment.

Suffrage

The right to vote in political elections.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The international document that was proposed in the General Assembly of United Nations on December 10, 1948, meant to provide basic rights and fundamental freedoms for all human beings.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

The effort of UN Women to abolish gender discrimination and strengthen the rudimentary adjustments for women empowerment and their decision-making power through supporting inter-governmental bodies.

Feminism movement

A movement to improve women's rights. This movement focuses on domestic violence, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and more

Gender Quota

Determines the minimum percentage or number of women participating in a parliament, government, or committee, so that they are given an equal chance to engage in those careers.

Gender stereotype

Thinking of a person in a typical way, based solely on their gender.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. It is often described as the “international bill of rights for women”. It defines what is considered discriminatory acts against women, and sets an agenda for national acts to end discrimination. They mainly support women’s rights to participate in public life.

Beijing Platform for Action

This took place in September, 1995, in the Fourth World Conference on Women. It outlines the obligation of governments to enhance the situation of gender inequality. It calls for removing barriers to allow women equal participation in the public sphere.

Brief history

Woman suffrage

In past history, women did not have many rights. They were not allowed to take on any occupations or leadership positions. They were usually left to only be in charge of domesticity and their children. Not one woman spoke up for their rights. However, in 1840, women started to collectively promote their rights en masse. They questioned their traditional roles, and tried to eradicate the social oppressions placed upon them.

In America, the movement for women's suffrage lasted for more than 70 years. The movement involved millions of women. They spent about 50 years educating the public and waging campaigns in the country to achieve legitimacy for “votes for women.” They lead the movement with non-violent actions to press their claims to the vote.

Until 1893, not one country permitted women’s suffrage or allowed them in parliament. However, it was that year New Zealand admitted suffrage for their women. They were followed by many other nations.

During this period, a woman named Seneca advocated for women’s suffrage in America with force, and therefore managed to seize hold of the nation’s attention

quickly. On August 18, 1940, women finally got their right to vote through the arrangement of the Nineteenth Amendment in the United States constitution. Other nations followed; thus, in 1940, most nations finally gave women their right to vote.

Key Issues

Unequal education

In the early 1900s, it was people's stereotypical conviction that women should only be devoted to their family, and that their only duties were cooking, cleaning, and looking after their children. Women could not pursue an education or a professional career.

Moreover, women were not allowed to possess their own property or wages, and could not sign a contract. Meanwhile, men were obligated to become educated and to find a job, in order to support their family. These were the main factors that suspended women's chances to show their true potential.

Unequal employment

Women were restricted from receiving an education and learning skills. This impeded women from having a professional career. This caused society to stereotype men as superior to women.

In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was settled. This act prohibited sex discrimination in on-the-job and apprenticeship programs. The act also opposes discriminatory employment practices, as well as sexually stereotyped advertisements for employment positions. Although there has been several attempts from Congress and the courts to take significant steps to eliminate sex discrimination, these types of cases are still difficult for an affected employee to address.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Afghanistan

After the very recent American war in Afghanistan (2001-2014), an average Afghan girl now only lives to 45 years of age, which is one year less than an average Afghan male. The majority of Afghan women are illiterate, and the majority of brides are under 16 years of age. One woman dies in childbirth every half hour, and more than 87 percent of women has said to have experienced domestic violence. More than one million widows are on the streets and are forced into prostitution. Afghanistan is the only country that has female suicide rate higher than that of males.

Turkey

OECD has ranked Turkey as number 35 (out of 36 countries) when measuring the quality of their citizens' lives. It was due to their low life satisfaction and gender inequality. Only 29 percent of Turkish women are employed. The country is also first in the number of minutes per day (nearly 400) women are doing unpaid domestic work, such as housework and childcare.

Mali

In a 2013 study, 91.4% of Mali's women said to have experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is a ritual that removes a part, or all, of the external female genitalia. The number has remained since 1993. 71% of the women are also married before 18 years of age.

Sudan

SIGI ranked Sudan as the lowest country for having the least restricted physical integrity. This includes domestic and sexual violence against women, FGM, and reproductive autonomy. Sudan does not have laws against these practises, nor does the country have any protection for women against sexual harassment. There are reports of women being beaten up for wearing trousers.

Organizations

UN Women

Also known as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women has been advocating for women empowerment in areas such as their status, formulation of policies, and global standard and norms. This is done in order to reinforce legislations on gender equality and to implement global awareness of gender issues. They achieve their goals by building workshops that offer educational training, and acting as an expert advisor for female political participation and campaigners on women's rights. Their ultimate goal is to ensure equality in our community.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
1848	Seneca Falls Convention (the first women's rights convention) is held. After two days, over sixty women and thirty men signed a declaration of sentiments. The declaration outlined grievances and set the agenda for the women's rights movement.
1890	The National Women Suffrage Association and the American Women Suffrage submerge to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The association begins waging a state-by-state campaign to obtain women's suffrage.
1893	New Zealand became the first country to admit women's right to vote. They were followed by Colorado (USA), the first state to grant it.
1903	The National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was established to advocate for enhanced wages and working conditions for women.

- 1964 Civil Rights Act eliminates discrimination based on race and sex in employment. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was also established to investigate criticisms and institute penalties.
- 1968 EEOC rules that sex-segregated help wanted ads in newspapers are illegal.
- 1973 Supreme court opens the way for women to apply for higher-paying jobs hitherto available only to men.
- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by UN General Assembly.
- 1995 Beijing Platform for Action was approved.
- 1996 Supreme Court rules that creating a separate all-female school will not be enough. They rule that the all-male Virginia Military school has to accept women in order to continue receiving public funding.
- 2003 Norway introduced and supported a gender quota for the first time.
- 2004 General Assembly Resolution A/RES/58/142 calls member states to adopt appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination in the public and political sphere.
- 2005 Supreme Court rules Title IX, which impedes discrimination based on gender and prohibits disciplining someone for opposing sex-based discrimination.
- 2005 United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) was proposed to highlight women's political participation and their leadership.
- 2013 Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that the restriction on women serving in combat-related roles would be abolished. This went against the 1994 rule that prohibited women from serving in combat. This enhancement is gradual, as some

positions will be available to women immediately, while some positions still have yet to be approved.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Although there have been relentless attempts from international conventions and organizations to diminish limitations on women's decision-making and power, many unjust factors still remain. The biggest change was made in 1979 by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which served as a framework for nations to follow, and called for national actions to improve the gender inequality issues. Then the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action was approved, which highlighted the obligation of governments to uphold gender equality and to get rid of barriers that banned women from being able to participate in the public sphere.

More significantly, every five years the member states reconvene to recognize their progress and to allot their new agenda to make further improvement. This is done with help from states of women and Millennium Development goals, who monitor and measure the improvement on the issue.

Furthermore, a gender quota is being adopted by more countries in their political system. A gender quota determines a minimum percentage or number of women participating in a parliament, government, or committee, so that they are given an equal chance to engage in those careers. This has definitely increased women participation. However, women participation remains comparatively low. Most countries only have around 20%, and some countries even have none. This is due to the fact that adopting a gender quota is a very complicated process that might cause collision with party organizations, because they violate the principles of liberty and democracy.

Possible Solutions

Factors such as stereotypes and prejudice are the main roots of the problem. They form social expectations that make women unable to further explore professional careers and leadership roles. These social expectations include the conviction that women are to stay home

and support the family by doing unpaid domestic work, such as cleaning and cooking. The bigger problem is that these job limitations lead women to be thought of as inferior to men. Therefore, the first step to be taken is to break the stereotypes, and **offer women more privileges than the men in those professional careers**. This will persuade women to take on such jobs, and will therefore increase the percentage of women employment in those career paths.

This can be done by **maintaining close relationships with fund services** that are related to gender equality in employment. This can also be done through usage of the **gender quota**, by saving separate seats for women employers so that they can easily get the positions, and will therefore cause an equal rate on professional jobs and politics.

However, the core of any significant change in women's access to equal rights lies within the **understanding between men and women**. The acknowledgment of both sexes is required to achieve a balance that benefits societies and the global community as a whole. This can be most effectively be brought about through education. Equal opportunities in education would develop their capacity, skills, and knowledge. These aspects will guide them towards pursuing influential roles in the community. As a result, they will be emancipated from traditional stereotypes and implied inferiorities. Thus, they will be able to get more decision-making authority and power anywhere, whether it be in a job, a family, or more.

Furthermore, establishing further **gender related legislations and reinforcing legal frameworks** are vital in improving the situation of gender segregation. Governments should further enhance the gender quota, so that more women will be able to participate in politics, and so that policies can take into account women's interests as well. This is all so that a more equal social environment can be born.

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