

Background Guide

# ECOSOC

HIGH SCHOOL MODEL UNITED NATION



**2015**

*Arise and Shine*

# CONTENTS

Committee Introduction	2
Statement of the Problem	2
History Discussion	3
● Progress of Gender Equality in the History	3
● The United Nations Millennium Declaration	3
● Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	4
● Combination between the post-2015 Agenda	4
Past UN actions	6
Possible Solutions	7
Questions to Consider	9
Suggestion for Further Research	10
Endnotes	10

## Committee Introduction

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six main organs of the United Nations established by the UN Charter in 1946.<sup>1</sup> It consists of 54 countries, 18 of which are elected each year by the General Assembly for a three-year term,<sup>2</sup> and seats in the Council are allotted based on geographical representation, which includes African States, Asian States, and Western Europe State.<sup>3</sup> The council aims to coordinate specialized agencies, functional commissions, regional economic commissions and non-governmental organizations to improve the economic, social, cultural and health matters, as well as human rights and fundamental freedom.

The Economic and Social Council also cooperates with other international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and World Bank. Through the cooperation with these organizations, ECOSOC can analyze different issues in global economy and sustainable development,<sup>4</sup> and further provide countries with specific monetary resources to fulfill the goal of ECOSOC. The ECOSOC is also the first conference that allows NGOs to take role in formal UN deliberations. There are more than 2300 NGOs that possess consultative status of ECOSOC, meaning they may utilize expertise, submit reports and make recommendations to the council on issues relating to their fields of work.<sup>5</sup> Thus, NGO plays an essential role in the ECOSOC.

## Statement of the Problem

The concept of sustainable development is rooted in the thinking of the international community. A famous quote from “Our Common Future” expresses that *“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*<sup>6</sup> Due to the impending possible exhaustion of oil and other non-renewable energy, sustainable development has been at the center of heated discussions worldwide. As a result, the Rio+20 conference, a conference discussing the ways to build a green economy to achieve sustainable development, was convened in 2012.<sup>7</sup> One of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 is an agreement reached by all the member States, to launch the process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015.<sup>8</sup>

Sustainable development can be divided into three main aspects, including economic, environmental and social. Among the three aspects, the social aspect is mostly related to the improvements of both individual and overall welfare. Under the idea, equality and poverty alleviation are essential and urgent issues, and therefore gender equality and women's empowerment are issues tackled in this field. However, gender inequality still remains unsolved today. In India, traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. Women are sometimes malnourished and earn less money than men even in the same work place. Still, they are banned to accumulate substantial financial assets because of the divorce law.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile in Switzerland, even being politically and financially advanced, gender inequality is also the issue that can't be ignored.

For example, of the 2,500 attendants of the four-day annual World Economic Forum in Davos, only a mere 425 are women.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the statistics indicate that two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are female and over 65% of its poorest people are women and girls. Aside from poverty, women also suffer from violence in the work place. For instance, an MDG-F-funded survey on gender-based violence in the workplace in Bangladesh found that more than a third of women have reported being victims of violence in their lives, and the overwhelming majority said they had observed it at work.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the situation above, UN has listed promoting gender equality and empowering women in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aim at eliminating the disparity of girls and boys in primary and secondary education system.<sup>12</sup> The MDG Achievement Fund (MDG-F) was later established with a view to accelerating the progress of MDGs. The MDG-Fund is an international cooperation mechanism through which UN agencies collaborate with national governments, local authorities and civil organizations to accelerate progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) worldwide. The Fund's particular aim is to ensure that the capital for the development is shared equally among the world's most disadvantaged populations, including women.<sup>13</sup>

Gender equality has become an issue that can't be ignored since it is not only a fundamental human right and a foundation for a sustainable and peaceful society,<sup>14</sup> but also a precondition of advancing development and reducing poverty.<sup>15</sup> Gender inequality can result in many problems in various aspects, including economic problems and population problems. The UN Population Fund has once claimed that, "Gender inequality holds back the growth of individuals, the development of countries and the evolution of societies, to the disadvantage of both men and women."<sup>16</sup> In the resolution that addresses gender inequality, empowering women economically is a critical component in the overall process. Women's empowerment of economy is also the foundation of social-economic development. Empowering women economically includes improving their economic status, power and agency. That is, women need to have the skills and resources to compete in the market; in addition, they should have the power and agencies to manage their profits.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, authorities concerned need to eliminate the barrier to women in the workplace, marketplace, or the community, and provide support to cope with the corresponding conditions.<sup>18</sup>

## History and Discussion

### *Progress of Gender Equality in the History*

Topics associated to the gender equality have never been formally discussed in the past thousands years of human history; and it is not until the publication of the notable work: *Vindication of the rights of woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 that the discussion is really beyond the table. Hundreds of years later, in the late nineteenth century, citizens in the UK and USA rallied themselves on the streets for the first time, urging their officials to establish regulations intending to protect women's rights in economic and political aspects.

Improvements had thus been made, and the parliaments of the two nations had then revised the legislations. During the past century, governments all over the world had made great efforts on improving gender equality; however, more substantive improvements are still needed.

Equality between genders has always been a basic principle of the United Nations. After the establishment of the UN in 1945, the organization had then settled one of their central goals as “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women” in the UN Charter.<sup>19</sup> And soon after that, in 1953, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* as an international treaty, which further recognized the statement “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” in Article 21 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Right*. Moreover, the treaty is specifically focused on the protection of women, and had given women the right to vote or hold office, with the protection of national law, equally with men and without discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Two decades after the adoption of the former treaty, The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) was adopted in order to further ensured gender equality by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. The CEDAW was facilitated by the first global conference in Mexico City in 1975, and the occasion had then been evaluated into one of the priority of UN agenda.<sup>21</sup> The UN had thus labeled the years between 1975 and 1985 as “Women Decade”; in addition, more conferences had been held after the initial conferences, including the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

### ***The United Nations Millennium Declaration***

In 2000, the UN adopted the *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, which is essentially eight international development goals that addresses some of the most pressing issues in the society. The third goal of the Declaration, which appears as “Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women”, indicates the target of “Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”<sup>22</sup> According to the target, to further enforce the protection and to improve the gender equality in order to reach the millennium goal, the UN Women (the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) was founded by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010, which defines their missions as assisting Member States to improve the condition in their own country at gender equality aspects. In the past several years, the UN Women had adopted a couple of missions in order to accomplish the goals. Still, more actions are needed to resolve the problem of un-equality between men and women.

### ***Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women***

Concluded from the report of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in order to further promote gender equality and to empower women, there are several aspects to consider, and these aspects could be roughly divided into three parts: to advance the women rights, to increase access to water and sanitation, and to ensure adequate daily necessities providing and also acceptable living condition.<sup>23</sup>

When it comes to advancing the rights of women, ensuring their paths to education are essential, and it is proved that only with enough education could women support themselves economically.<sup>24</sup> However, in the recent reports, there are still about 67 countries having their primary school attendance rates for girls less than 8 percent and only 96 girls for every 100 boys in primary schools nowadays.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, according to UN-Water's (the UN Inter-Agency Mechanism on All Freshwater Related Issues, Including Sanitation) *World Water Development Report 2012*, adequate water provision and enough water infrastructures can aid the improvement on equal allocation of resources between men and women.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, eliminating poverty and enhance sanitary standard in the society also contribute to the protection of women rights and the assurance of living standard. As the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) of 2011 had highlighted in the conference, women in several countries do not get enough opportunities to access modern energy, and the lack of energy hinders women's participation in a green economy.<sup>27</sup> It is apparent that only by appropriate measures, including providing enough resources and establish sustainable development, could the equality between genders be improved, and cooperation between UN organs, governments and NGOs is definitely needed.

### ***Combination Between the Post-2015 Development Agenda***

Ten years after the implementation of the MDGs, the 2010 High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly was held in order to review the progress of the development on MDGs and also to urge for further acceleration. After the conference, the UN Secretary-General founded the UN System Task Team in order to support the Post-2015 Development Agenda and to further advance the former progress in the MDGs. As UN-Women mentioned in their reports, "UN Women is calling for integration of gender equality concerns throughout the other priority areas and goals of the post-2015 development agenda, with clear targets and indicators". Additionally, UN-Women urges to establish minimum standard for the goals and focus in three different aspects, which appears as, addressing violence against women, including the need to expand women's choices and capabilities, and ensuring that women have a voice in several parts.<sup>28</sup> It is sure that in order to implement sustainable development through gender equality, a combination between the agenda's goals and measures improving gender equality is essential and needed to be considered.

### **Past Actions**

As the Economic and Social Council is entitled to integrate different matters regarding social well-being, a significant amount of actions have been taken to promote sustainable development through gender equality. The council has not only succeeded in overseeing the execution of commitments made at the Rio+20 Conference,<sup>29</sup> but has also contributed to gender equality and female development at the High-level and general ECOSOC meetings. In 2012, ECOSOC presented the Vienna Policy on Gender Equality<sup>30</sup> through cooperation with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). This helped the international community

recognize the changes of advancements brought through women's empowerment, as a result of global shifts in development. In 2014, the Council hosted the High-level Political Forum<sup>31</sup> (HLPF) and will continue to do so in 2015. The HLPF addresses the theme where "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals and charting the way for an ambitious post-2015 development agenda, including the sustainable development goals" will be discussed and emphasized on. The Council will aspire to address the issue on "Strengthening integration, implementation and review" at the HPLF on the consecutive year.

Aside from the Economic and Social Council, many more UN entities have made efforts to promote the significance of gender equality and its role in assisting sustainable development. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) stresses economic and sustainable development, democratic governance, poverty reduction and crisis prevention and recovery. Several projects, being well known as associates to the UNDP, provide considerable strategies to implement sustainable development and further enhance the MDGs. This includes the Global Gender and Economic Policy Initiative (GEPMI) and the Secretary-General's initiative "UNiTE to End Violence against Women". As we understand the core concept, where "the incorporation of women as means to achieve the goals of sustainable development, gender equality and women's empowerment", further policies that address sustainability and gender issues have been tackled by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), as policies suggestions are generated through global and regional planning.

Other well-known cases regarding the issue like the "HeForShe" initiative, most famously addressed by the actress and UN-Women Ambassador, Emma Watson, aims to promote gender equality through mobilizing men as advocates. To make things more specific, we can also consider the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where women over the age of forty were provided with the opportunity to receive training as professional caretakers.<sup>32</sup> Such cases assist women to obtain jobs, which again lead to economic empowerment and a gradual reduction of poverty. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations<sup>33</sup> (FAO) has also addressed this concept. By bringing forth training modules on gender, collecting data on gender analysis in relation to water management, and addressing women's access to control and ownership of water resources, the organization has managed to help emphasize the importance of achieving gender equality in natural resource management.

## **Possible Solutions**

The Economic and Social Council has cooperated and collaborated with several committees, organizations, initiatives and campaigns, regarding the issue of implementing gender equality and empowering women to assist sustainable development. It is also open to even more innovative solutions to improve current situations. It is important that the committee places emphasis on: water, poverty

eradication, natural resource management, energy, sustainable urbanization, and food security, as possible solutions to promote sustainable development practices through gender equality.

The UN Inter-Agency Mechanism on All Freshwater Related Issues, Including Sanitation <sup>34</sup> (UN-Water) has proved that through adopting a gender-sensitive developmental approach, the conservation and sustainability of water is efficiently enhanced. The UNDP, on the other hand, tends to address issues on how women tend to receive a lack of educational, land, and financial resources. Such factors may lead to inefficient practices regarding food production, which is an industry largely reliant on female labor. Therefore, advocating economic rights and opportunities may serve as a feasible strategy to demine the relevance of the issue.

It is also essential to incorporate women to managing our natural resources, granted that they are more likely to stay associated with jobs and tasks that are directly related to the environment. Through gaining water entitlements, catalysts contributing to violence can be eliminated and the women's decision making on managing natural resources may promote economic recovery.<sup>35</sup> Women would be able to avoid use of inefficient stoves that may result to lung disease, lung cancer and many more illnesses due to indoor pollution. Attaining access to safe-energy uses, such as solar engineering will contribute greatly to aiding women in becoming financially sufficient. Such practices have been established in Mauritania,<sup>36</sup> where a solar power oven was installed in a small village. Examples like such will help reduce poverty and utilize sustainable energy solutions.

The Economic and Social Council also adheres to the concept on how urbanization benefits the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions regarding sustainable development. By building a strong, safe and accessible environment for both men and women to inhabit, it is most likely that both genders may thrive under such circumstances, while granted a stable community to build their lives on.

If we exploit the rights of those responsible for producing food for our livings, chances are that the quality of such products may come out questionable. As noted on how women are usually more likely to participate in food production, it is crucial that they are provided with opportunities entitling them to economic gains as a result of their contribution. When women obtain more control over their assets, they are keener to produce food that allows safety of the household. Due to a fair share of decision making during the process of self-producing food, gender-sensitive indicators are enhanced while leading to safer practices and increased sustainable nutrition.<sup>37</sup>



Alternative solutions that may be applicable in developing nations include increasing governmental support for vulnerable female-headed households, policy-adaptation that ensures gender equality among rural and urban workforces, or even micro-loans that assist agricultural developments and encourage local entrepreneurship for women with the need and potential.

In 2008, Moldova<sup>38</sup> established a policy focusing on vulnerable families, which increased child benefits in female-reliant households to reduce the burden of impoverished and struggling women. In Kyrgyzstan,<sup>39</sup> the Women Entrepreneur's support Association "Woman's Right to Land" (WESA) conducted an initiative that developed a successful model of facilitating cooperation between government agencies and private sector organizations to ensure female rights to property and inheritance. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's Parabank<sup>40</sup> included a Credit Life Insurance in their programming to protect the unsecured group loans where increased focus on client protection has aided low-income, female microloan clients who are over indebted and making the first initiative to start their own businesses.

Due to the critical role that many women play in various aspects of society, their means of survival and right to equality may directly or indirectly contribute to sustainable development. As many undeveloped, developing and developed countries plunge towards innovative solutions to eradicate poverty, promote natural and energy resource management, enhance food security and nutrition, the approach does not include sufficient infrastructure, cultural and religious practices, or even regional and global ideals to make solid improvement of women's rights an sustainable development. Implementation and ratification of feasible ideas and righteous ideals must be made through the greatest effort, in order to achieve civilizational and humanitarian progress within the global community.

## Questions to Consider

1. Regarding the issue of gender equality and sustainable development, what are some innovative and realistic solutions that can be implemented in everyday lives? What role can the ECOSOC take in addressing the issue?
2. Of the various fields and aspects of sustainable development, how can solutions be implemented in order to address the urgency and severity of the issues?
3. What are some shortfalls of the MDGs, or what objectives have the MDGs failed to address during the past 15 years? What aspects will gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development fall under the future world agenda of development?

4. What kinds of solutions can connect the areas of women's empowerment and sustainable development? What role can ECOSCO play in coordinating the effort of the two aspects?

## Suggestions for Further Research

Besides reading comprehensively through this background guide, the dais would suggest to look into various media sources regarding this topic. In order to broaden your scope of research, it is crucial to acquire information from multiple news sources to reduce the effect of media bias. Delegates should also be aware of the latest development of the issue via useful resources including but not limited to The New York Times, BBC News, and The Diplomat, Reuters, Le Monde and the Wall Street Journal.

As a representative of a country, delegates should know precisely the country's stance regarding the topic. It is the way to keep in mind the policies and interest of the country, which can be done by searching for official publications or press releases produced by local governments.

It is equally important to have an excellent understanding of ECOSOC as well as all the workings of the United Nations. Related mandate, mechanisms and entities of this committee are to be studied, with the information of all which can be found on ECOSOC's official website (<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>). Past resolutions and treaties can be found through the UN Documentation Centre (<http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>), including voting records, thus acquiring information about countries' past actions.

The dais team wishes a good luck on the preparations for the conference. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should the delegate have any questions or concerns regarding the committee, the topic, or the conference in general.

## Endnotes

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