ECOSOC Background Guide

Committee Overview

The Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, is one of the six main organs of the United Nations founded by the UN Charter in 1946. ECOSOC is the "central mechanism" of the UN system, and supervises the individual bodies and groups that relate to economic, social, and environmental issues. There are 54 member governments on the Council, which are elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. Seats are give based on geographical representation, with fourteen allocated to African States, eleven to Asian States, six to Eastern European States, ten to Latin America States, and thirteen to Western European and other States. Martin Sajdik is the current President of ECOSOC.[i]

Women's Empowerment

Inequality and discrimination against women have long been problems in many countries. Pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment is important because both issues are not only human rights, but also crucial pathways achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight international development goals agreed by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions, and sustainable development. While great strides have been taken thus far on women's empowerment and gender equality, the progress is uneven across different countries. Women's empowerment is important because it is the basis of peace, security and sustainable development. The United Nations seeks women's empowerment through the establishment of UN Women, dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Still, there are many areas where the empowerment of women needs to be done and ECOSOC will address this issue around the globe.

Economic Empowerment of Women

"There is no tool for development more effective than the economic development of women," stated by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of United Nations.[ii] Economic empowerment of women is the ability of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. [iii] Economic empowerment increases a women's access to economic resources and allows them to exert control over their choices and influences in societies.

Critical for economic resilience and growth is an equitable society. As former U.S. President Bill Clinton once said, "Women perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation."[iv] Women's empowerment correlates to the economy of a nation. For example, in India, GDP would rise by 8% if the female and male ratio of workers increased by 10%.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are the catalyst to many development goals, like poverty reduction, child mortality, and peace. As research indicates that women usually invest a higher proportion of their income into their families and communities than men, empowering women can benefit the society as a whole. A study in Brazil also showed that the child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled the household income. [v] Women who are economically empowered tend to contribute more to societies and national economies and invest more in their children, which provide a route to sustainable development. Because women make up the majority of the world's less economically advantaged population, before addressing poverty reduction, the UN must address women and their economic empowerment.

Even though empowering women is an advantageous situation for not only women, but also the society, some key challenges still remain in obtaining gender equality and empowerment of women. While there has been great progress in engaging women in labor force, there has been less progress in improving working condition, eliminating discriminatory practices and laws in property rights and inheritance rights, or providing childcare. Across the developing world, women are working longer hours and being paid less than men.[vi] Women also spend more time doing unpaid job, such as household chores, than men and have much less time spend in remunerative employment. In a survey done in six states in India, women typically spend 35 hours per week on household tasks and caring for children, the sick and elderly, against 4 hours per week for men.[vii] Even when women are employed in the labor force, they still undertake the majority of the housework. This contributes to the limited time for women to do paid job to obtain income for the family and the lower women's per capita average earned income. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for working mothers to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Income in the hands of women can benefit the children. Thus, gender gap in income earning can decrease or limit the resources available for children, such as health care, education, and adequate nutrition. To achieve possible equality in the workforce, United Nations need to take a step to encourage and empower women.

Women not only earn less than men, but also tend to own fewer assets. Gender bias and inheritance rights or law leave women and children in greater poverty risks. When a marriage breaks down, women will be excluded from owning the property. Widows risk losing familial property and ownership of assets or land and struggle to achieve health and well-being of themselves and their children because of lack of money and assets. For example, in Cameroon, while women undertake 75% of agriculture work, they only own 10% of the land.[viii]

The empowerment of women can benefit children greatly because women generally place a higher premium on welfare related goals and are more likely to contribute their resources or earnings to promote the needs of families, particularly children. According to a study conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute, if men and women had equal influence in decision-making, the incidence of underweight children under 3 years old in South Asia would fall by up to 13 %, resulting in 13.4 million fewer undernourished children in the region.[ix] This is because women tend to care more for education and the well-being of their children. Empowering women can also increases the likelihood that their children, boys and girls, will attend school and receive education.

The barriers in obtaining economic empowerment of women must be examined in full scale. Factors impacting women's economic empowerment include violence: women are the predominant victims of conflict, sexual violence, injury, death, intimidation and human trafficking, lack of adequate access to education, training and technology, lack of access to clean water, sanitation, lack of access to responsible health care, lack of access to credit, safe work conditions, living minimum wages. Culture practices, tradition, and religious interpretations of women's status, women's lack of knowledge about rights and laws and lack of adequate representation in governance structures can also hinder the economic empowerment of women.[x]

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment of women is unbreakable from economic empower of women; it is a process of building a sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and decision-making influence in women. Women face many social challenges today, whether it is secure income for their families

or raising children in amidst of economic difficulties. Social empowerment allows women to gain confidence and self-dependence of their rights and their decisions.

Gender discrimination begins as early as the parents' preference of sons over daughters because many cultures believe that son brings asset to the family, while daughters will be married off to other families. Gender discrimination is pervasive throughout regions; even though the degree of discrimination may vary, women and girls are often deprived of opportunities, resources and political power in every region in the world. Discrimination includes limited personal and professional choices for girls and women, the denial of basic human rights and gender-based violence.[xi]

Gender inequality can be pernicious and tragic. In parts of South and East Asia, prenatal sex selection and infanticide show the low value placed on the lives of girls and have led to unbalanced population of men and women. Despite increasing educational enrollment, girls are more likely to miss school in developing countries due household responsibilities and family duties, such as caring for their siblings and taking care of household chores. Another reasons of girls missing school include a lack of school sanitation, child marriage and violence.[xii]

Social attitudes, beliefs, and practices of excluding and discriminating women are often deeply entrenched cultural, religious and social norms. The World Values Survey reveals that a large number of men believe university education is more important for men than women.[xiii] Many of these discriminations are subtler and are harder to identify and rectify. The uneven allocation of household resources, such as medical care and food and unequal division of household labor, trap women and families in poverty. Sometimes, the discriminatory attitude toward women can be seen even in women; it has become a perception that is shared by the

entire society. A survey shows that a large number of women view that men make better political leaders than women, including respondents from Bangladesh, China, Islamic Republic of Iran and Uganda, over one third from Albania and Mexico, and one out of every five from the United States.[xiv]

In decades of innovation, experience and activism, gender equality is a problem that can be solved. To combat the problems of gender equality, governments need to take an important step towards equality. Political commitment can trigger social changes and allocate resources necessary for gender equality and women's empowerment. Nearly every country had made a commitment to equal rights for women and girls by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) before the UN Millennium Summit in 2000[xv]. Striving to meet the UN Millennium Development Goal 3, gender equality, by 2015, countries can strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls, invest in infrastructure to reduce women's and girl's time burdens, and eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation. [xvi]

Questions to consider:

1. What are the obstacles to achieving women's empowerment in your country? What has your country done to support or undermine women's empowerment?

2. How can the United Nations community help to encourage economic and social empowerment of women (women in the workforce and in society)?

3. Should the government pass laws to encourage women's empowerment or would this counteract the effort?

4. What can be done to overcome the barriers of the social, religious, and cultural norms that hinder gender equality?

Helpful Links:

http://www.unwomen.org/en (latest new about women's empowerment and ways how United Nations help to achieve the goal)

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ (United Nations Millennium Development Goals website)

http://www.unicef.org/gender/ (UNICEF page on gender equality)

Universal Primary Education

Background of Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, all 191 United Nations members signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which illustrated the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were to be achieved by 2015.[xvii] These goals are:

"1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

2) Achieve universal primary education

3) Promote gender equality and empower women

4) Reduce child mortality

5) Improve maternal health

6) Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases

 7) Ensure environmental sustainability

8) Develop a global partnership for development"[xviii]

Although significant progress has been achieved in the last 15 years, some goals will very likely not be attained by 2015, most notably the goals to empower women and achieve universal primary education.

About the Universal Primary Education Goal

Education has been shown to reduce poverty and hunger, fight disease, and help promote environmental sustainability. As such, it is vital to a nation's development that children enroll in school at an early age, and complete a full cycle of quality education.[xix] Unfortunately, about one in four children in developing areas, including Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, are likely to drop out of primary school. [xx]

The benefits of primary education are not abstract, but extremely pragmatic. Schools are often sources of clean water and hygienic latrines. At school, children can learn life skills, including proper hygiene and how to avoid diseases like HIV/AIDs and malaria. Students may also receive vaccines and nutritional supplements through their local schools. In conflict-torn regions, schools provide a safe place for children to gather. In addition, universal education is linked with gender equality; the "multiplier effect" describes how educated girls marry later in life and have fewer children, who in turn are more likely to survive and be better fed and educated. Finally, uneducated children are more likely to be abused, exploited, and are more susceptible to diseases.[xxi]

Obstacles

A major obstacle to universal primary education is regional conflict; about 50% of primary aged out-of-school children live in conflict-affected areas.[xxii] Conflict-torn areas make up 25-33% of the countries in which UNICEF works to improve education.[xxiii]

The "education poor," defined as indigenous populations, street children, the disabled, and ethnic minorities, are the most likely to not be enrolled in school.[xxiv] The Global Campaign for Education UK estimates that 1/3 of primary aged children not in school have a disability, which amounts to 19 million children. Solutions to increase primary school enrollment must be tailored to specifically meet the needs of the disabled and other "education poor."[xxv]

Finally, school fees have proved an obstacle to universal primary education, although many countries have recently eliminated fees to increase enrollment.[xxvi]

Strategies

The Education for All (EFA), a branch of UNESCO, has taken the lead in promoting universal primary education. Founded in 1990, the EFA has been a major part of the MDGs, and has further listed six goals related to education:

1) Improve early childhood care and education, especially for the most disadvantaged children

2) Ensure that by 2015 all children, especially girls and minorities, have access to complete free primary education of good quality

3) Ensure that young adults are given access to learning and life-skills programs

4) Achieve 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015

5) Achieve full gender equality education by 2015

6) Improve the quality of education[xxvii]

Both UNESCO and UNICEF emphasize the importance of effective aid delivery, strong promotion of education, and creating connections between government and other cultural institutions. [xxviii]In an example of the latter, UNICEF's "Go Girls! Education for Every Child" program focuses on increasing female enrollment in school through sports and communication

with local religious leaders.[xxix] UNESCO's Education Sector assists developing countries in education policymaking and implementation. [xxx] UNESCO also oversees the distribution of aid to maximize the efficacy of that aid; this could include ensuring that schools have safe water, proper sanitation, and adequate school supplies.

The UN Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI) focuses on increasing the number of girls enrolled in school. Girls are often the first to drop out of school due to sick family members, chores, or lack of money. [xxxi] Specifically, abolishing school fees has proven very effective in increasing primary school attendance. For example, in Burundi attendance increased from 54% to 94% from 2000 to 2005, as a result of eliminating school fees.[xxxii] In Nicaragua, social cash transfers proved effective. In a social cash system, the government will pay disadvantaged families a stipend if those families fulfill certain requirements, like sending their children to school or getting children vaccinated.[xxxiii] Doubling spending on education, teaching local dialects in schools, and focusing on disadvantaged children have proven to be effective methods of increasing attendance.[xxxiv]

Overall, in the Middle East and Africa, focusing efforts to get orphans in school, as well as vouchers for uniforms and books, has increased enrollment in school. In Asia and Latin America, social cash stipends and focusing on ethnic minorities have worked well.[xxxv]

Progress, Yet Impossibility of Fulfillment

From 2000 to 2011, the number of children out of primary school decreased from 102 million to 58 million. [xxxvi] Individual countries have also made significant progress. Julia Gillard, board chair of Global Partnership, said that "In Cambodia, for example, 98% of primary school children now complete school- in 2003 only 66% did."[xxxvii] Also, according to Equality Now, girls presently make up 40% of school children in Afghanistan, though girls were banned

from school when the MDGs were adopted.[xxxviii] However, due to slow progress since 2007, the goal of universal primary education will not be fulfilled by 2015.

Progress slows even as enrollment rates rise, because many primary school students do not complete primary school. Teacher shortages are also a huge problem, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the least progress has been made. Sometimes, the pupil-teacher ratios reach an alarming 80:1, degrading the quality of education.[xxxix]

As of June 2014, 58 million primary school aged children are not in school. Due to a population boom, as well as regional conflicts, 30 million of the 58 million out-of-school children are from Sub-Saharan Africa. [xl] Gender parity has also not been reached; for every 100 boys out of school, there are 117 girls not in school.[xli] As mentioned before, girls and women, minorities, the disabled, and those living in rural areas, urban slums, and conflict-torn regions remain the most likely to be uneducated.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in his 2013 report that the "target of universal primary education by 2015 seems beyond reach."[xlii]

Post-2015 Goals

As 2015 approaches, the UN has not officially decided upon the next set of goals, although education will definitely be addressed in some fashion. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in his 2013 address that he believes that young people should have access not only to quality primary education, but also secondary school, as well as vocational training.[xliii]

So, it is up to you to design innovative ways to solve these problems and develop a plan for the Post-2015 Goals.

Questions to Consider

How is your country working to achieve the goal of universal primary education?

What should be the post-2015 goals regarding universal primary education? Is the goal impractical?

Is universal primary education a priority, or are there other goals that are more important?

While many Latin American and Southeast Asian countries have greatly improved their primary education enrollment, Sub-Saharan Africa falls behind. How do we solve this regional disparity in education?

Places for Further Research
UNESCO's Position Paper on Education Post-2015:
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002273/227336E.pdf

Secretary-General's 2013 Report on MDGs:
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/202. Especially important are pages 5, 13-15.

Statistics on Primary School Enrollment in Specific Regions:
http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/out-of-school-children.aspx

To join the discussion on the Post-2015 goals, explore the World We Want forum at http://www.worldwewant2015.org/. [xliv]

[i] "About ECOSOC," UN Economic and Social Council, https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/.
[ii] Puneet Walia, "Economic Empowerment of Women," *Indians Streams Research Journal* 3, no. 6 (July 2013): [Page 1], http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/92621230/economic-empowerment-women.
[iii] *Women's Economic Empowerment* (n.p.: DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), 2011), [Page 6], http://www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/47561694.pdf.
[iv] *Women's Economic Empowerment*, [Page 5-6].
[v] *Women's Economic Empowerment*, [Page 6].
[vi] *The State of the World's Children 2007* (New York, NY: UNICEF, 2006), [Page 38-40].
[vii] *The State of the World's*, [Page 38].
[viii] *The State of the World's*, [Page 40].
[ix] *The State of the World's*, [Page 16].
[x] Somalia International Rehabilitation Centre (CIRC), Lund Horn of Africa Forum (LUHAF), and Department of Economic History, Lund University, "The Role of Women in Promoting Peace and Development," in *The Role of Women in Promoting Peace and Development*, [Page 125], http://sirclund.se/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Conf2011.pdf#page=125%20(.
[xi] *The State of the World's*, [Page 6].
[xii] *The State of the World's*, [Page 7].

xiii *The State of the World's*, [Page 8].

xiv *The State of the World's*, [Page 8].

xv *Gender*, [Page 27], http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Gender-chapters1-3.pdf.

xvi *Gender*, [Page 29].

xvii "The Millennial Development Goals: Progress Report 2002; occupied Palestinian territory," United Nations Development Programme, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/Programme%20of%20 Assistance%20to%20the%20Palestinian%20People/oPT_MDGReport_2002.pdf.

xviii "Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2/.

xix "Universal Primary Education Goal Impossible," *The Guardian*, 1, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/universal-primary-education.

xx "Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme.

xxi "Goal: Achieve universal primary education," Millennium Development, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.unicef.org/mdg/education.html.

xxii "Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme.

xxiii "Goal: Achieve universal primary," Millennium Development.

xxiv "Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme.

xxv "Universal Primary Education Goal," 1.

xxvi "Goal: Achieve universal primary," Millennium Development.

xxvii "Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, accessed August 28, 2014, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/education-and-the-mdgs/goal-2/.

xxviii "Education Strategy," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, accessed August 28, 2014, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/strategy/.

xxix "Goal: Achieve universal primary," Millennium Development.

xxx "Education Strategy," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

xxxi "Goal: Achieve universal primary," Millennium Development.

xxxii "Universal Primary Education Goal," 1.

xxxiii Ibid.

xxxiv Ibid.

xxxv Ban Kimoon, "Report of the Secretary-General," in *United Nations General Assembly* (n.p.: n.p., 2013), accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/202.

xxxvi Ibid.

xxxvii Natricia Duncan, "How the MDGs have changed the world: eight leaders reflect," *The Guardian*, August 17, 2014, 2, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/aug/17/leaders-on-mdgs-500-days.

xxxviii Ibid.

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xl "Universal Primary Education Goal," 1.

xli "Goal: Achieve universal primary," Millennium Development.

xlii Kimoon, "Report of the Secretary-General," in *United Nations General Assembly*, 5.

xliii Ibid, 15.

xliv "Post-2015 Development Agenda," United Nations Development Programme, accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/post-2015-development-agenda/.

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