



# THE 71ST SESSION OF MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY ISSUES BOOK

1. Women and Sustainable Development
2. Promoting Women's Political Leadership



The General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and was established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations. The Assembly consists of all UN Member States and may discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organ provided for in the Charter. It may make recommendations to UN members or the Security Council or both on any such questions or matters, except disputes or situations in respect of which the Security Council is currently exercising its functions. (UN Handbook, 2017-18)

At Model United Nations of the Far West, the General Assembly considers two agenda items and also engages in a Special Session, the theme of which is determined by the President of the General Assembly. The title of this session is introduced in the weeks leading up to conference and tests delegates' ability to work on the basis of consensus. In addition to drafting and voting on its own resolutions, the General Assembly votes to approve the outcome documents of its subcommittees at the Closing Plenary Session on the final day of conference.

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# WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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The United Nations (UN) acknowledged and supported women's rights within Article 1 of their founding charter, which was signed in 1945. The next year, the Commission on the Status of Women was established. In 2010, a new body (UN Women) focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment was created, which strengthened and combined the UN's efforts in these fields.<sup>1</sup>

With the 2030 Agenda and the accompanying 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), the focus of the UN's work was put towards sustainable development, which was defined as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.<sup>2</sup> Sustainable development comprises three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. Women and girls are an integral component of achieving these goals, as they *"represent half of the world's population and therefore half of its potential"*.<sup>3</sup> An example of this potential was visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the crisis, countries led by women fared comparatively better than countries led by men. Women employed a more collective than individual approach and were able to communicate fact-based public health information in an effective and compassionate manner. Overall, female-led countries observed lower COVID-19 death rates and were commended for their successes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "Gender Equality," Global Issues, accessed August 7, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda," Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "Gender Equality."

<sup>4</sup> UN Women, "COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better," 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-covid-19-and-women-s-leadership>.

In contrast to the valuable role women play on the global political stage as well as in local communities, they are still discriminated against and see their rights violated. In 49 countries, there is no legal protection from domestic violence. In 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal rights; and in 18 countries, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working. Women only represent 13% of the world's agricultural land holders and are underrepresented in managerial positions. Compared to men, they spend more time on unpaid domestic and care work. Besides the socio-cultural impacts, all these factors hinder women from earning an individual income, contributing to a country's gross domestic product (GDP), and from sharing their potential with their community.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality**

In 2015, the UN decided on 17 goals for sustainable development (SDGs).<sup>6</sup> Goal 5 was exclusively dedicated to gender equality. The following 9 targets were decided on to achieve gender equality:

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

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<sup>5</sup> UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2018, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>; UN Women, "COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better."

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda."

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

5.A Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

5.B Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.C Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.<sup>7</sup>

The UN regularly reports on these targets to inform the public and the member states about positive and negative developments. The 2021 report shows that violence against women remains at a high level.<sup>8</sup> Nearly one in three women has suffered from violence at least once since the age of 15. The threat of domestic violence is expected to grow during the COVID-19

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations, "Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls," Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 7, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021," 2021, [https://doi.org/10.29171/azu\\_acku\\_pamphlet\\_k3240\\_s878\\_2016](https://doi.org/10.29171/azu_acku_pamphlet_k3240_s878_2016).

pandemic. Also, child marriages are expected to become more common again, due to economic unrest and school closures.

Little progress has been made on women's equal participation in decision-making. On a global average, women only hold 25.6 percent of seats in national parliaments. Mostly by use of quotas, 23 countries have achieved a female representation of 40 percent in their national parliaments. Women are also underrepresented in managerial positions (in 2019, 28.2 percent of managerial positions were held by women), although they make up 39 percent of the global workforce. Besides being part of the global workforce, women are also highly engaged in unpaid domestic and care work, where they spend about 2.5 times as many hours as men. Due to the pandemic, the amount of time women have spent on childcare has increased from 26 to 31 hours per week. This increase in time allotted to unpaid work may threaten their ability to work in paid jobs. Consequently, a decline in women's labor force participation has already been observed in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

### **The SDG indicators from a gender equality perspective**

In order to measure the goals' successes transparently, 232 indicators were added to the SDGs in 2017.<sup>10</sup> Forty of these indicators are gender-specific and are allocated to goals other than SDG 5. For example, the maternal mortality rate (indicator 3.1.1) and the adolescent birth rate (3.7.2) are gender specific indicators within SDG 3 (Good health and Well being). Another example are selected indicators for SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), e.g., sexual violence against girls (indicator 16.2.3) and women in public institutions (indicator 16.7.1).

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda."

However, all SDGs and their indicators can and should be viewed from a gender perspective, since all goals are interwoven with women's lives and experiences.<sup>11</sup>

SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) doesn't have a gender-specific indicator. However, the accessibility of clean water and sanitary facilities has a big impact on girls' lives, since they rely on access to these facilities in order to manage their periods safely and with dignity. One in four girls in Nigeria reported that she has missed school due to menstruation. Similar numbers were reported from Côte d'Ivoire (1 in 5) and Burkina Faso (1 in 7). Hence, girls' needs should be prioritized when planning sanitation and hygienic services in schools in order to give them the opportunity to get an uninterrupted education.<sup>12</sup>

A closer look at SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) demonstrates how the lack of clean energy resources impacts women's and girls' health. As women and girls perform considerably more domestic work, e.g., cooking, they are often exposed to toxic fumes from burning coal or biomass. This exposure to harmful household air pollution has led to 1.8 million premature deaths of women, mainly in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Providing families and communities with clean energy resources could therefore reduce the number of premature deaths and chronic diseases attributed to hazardous fuels.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UN Women, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020," 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2020>.

<sup>12</sup> UN Women.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## Climate change

In recent decades, changes in weather patterns and catastrophes such as floods have started to transform landscapes and thus endangered the livelihoods of many regional communities.<sup>14</sup> These meteorological phenomena can be attributed to climate change and affect every region in the world.<sup>15</sup> Communities in the rural Global South are more threatened by these extremes, however, since they depend on agriculture, have fewer natural and economic resources, and weak social services.<sup>16</sup> Confronting these challenges requires high levels of resiliency and flexibility from communities, especially from women, as they are known to perform more climate-sensitive activities, such as water and fuelwood collection.<sup>17</sup> Their livelihoods often depend on agriculture and livestock, which makes them dependent on stable weather conditions.<sup>18</sup> During droughts, for example, women have to spend more time acquiring water, which leaves them with less time for education or income-generating activities.<sup>19</sup> Overall, women are more vulnerable to climate change.<sup>20</sup> Hence, taking action on climate change, as called for in SDG 13, with the aim to reduce or prevent further changes in weather patterns and catastrophes, would benefit women directly on many levels.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Julie Drolet et al., “Women Rebuilding Lives Post-Disaster: Innovative Community Practices for Building Resilience and Promoting Sustainable Development,” *Gender and Development* 23, no. 3 (2015): 433–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2015.1096040>.

<sup>15</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Global Warming of 1.5 °C” (Geneva, Switzerland, 2018), [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15\\_Full\\_Report\\_Low\\_Res.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_Low_Res.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Lykke E. Andersen, Dorte Verner, and Manfred Wiebelt, “Gender and Climate Change in Latin America: An Analysis of Vulnerability, Adaptation and Resilience Based on Household Surveys,” *Journal of International Development* 29, no. 7 (2017): 857–76, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3259>.

<sup>18</sup> Elena Belcore, Alessandro Pezzoli, and Angela Calvo, “Analysis of Gender Vulnerability to Climate-Related Hazards in a Rural Area of Ethiopia,” *Geographical Journal* 186, no. 2 (2020): 156–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12321>.

<sup>19</sup> Emmeline Skinner, “Gender and Climate Change: Overview Report. BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Climate Change” (Brighton, 2011), <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/gender-and-climate-change-overview-report/>.

<sup>20</sup> Belcore, Pezzoli, and Calvo, “Analysis of Gender Vulnerability to Climate-Related Hazards in a Rural Area of Ethiopia.”

<sup>21</sup> UN Women, “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020.”



## Women and health

Regarding health, women carry several different burdens. They are the backbone of the world's health systems, either as unpaid primary caregivers in their homes, community health care workers in remote areas, or as health care workers in hospitals or other formal settings.<sup>22</sup> Here, they are often underpaid and tend to fill lower-skilled jobs than men.<sup>23</sup> Even though most health care providers in the world are women,<sup>24</sup> they are underrepresented in managerial positions in global health.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, women are consumers of healthcare and rely on medical help, for example during child birth. Women in developing countries are often cared for, however, by community health workers, traditional birth attendants or untrained relatives.<sup>26</sup> By supporting and training these caregivers maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality could be reduced effectively.

Another important aspect at the intersection of women and girls, health and sustainable development is reproductive health. By giving women the opportunity to control their fertility, women's autonomy and access to education and employment could be increased.<sup>27</sup> In addition,

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<sup>22</sup> Ana Langer et al., "Women and Health: The Key for Sustainable Development," *The Lancet* 386, no. 9999 (2015): 1165–1210, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60497-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60497-4).

<sup>23</sup> A. George, "Human Resources for Health: A Gender Analysis. Paper Commissioned by the Women and Gender Equity Knowledge Network" (Geneva, Switzerland, 2007), [https://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/resources/human\\_resources\\_for\\_health\\_wgkn\\_2007.pdf](https://www.who.int/social_determinants/resources/human_resources_for_health_wgkn_2007.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> A George, "Nurses, Community Health Workers, and Home Carers: Gendered Human Resources Compensating for Skewed Health Systems," *Global Public Health* 3, no. sup1 (April 2008): 75–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441690801892240>.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer A Downs et al., "Increasing Women in Leadership in Global Health," *Academic Medicine* 89, no. 8 (2014), [https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2014/08000/Increasing\\_Women\\_in\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Global\\_Health.11.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2014/08000/Increasing_Women_in_Leadership_in_Global_Health.11.aspx).

<sup>26</sup> Lale Say and Rosalind Raine, "A Systematic Review of Inequalities in the Use of Maternal Health Care in Developing Countries: Examining the Scale of the Problem and the Importance of Context," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 85, no. 10 (October 2007): 812–19, <https://doi.org/10.2471/blt.06.035659>.

<sup>27</sup> Gita Sen, "The World Programme of Action: A New Paradigm for Population Policy," *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 37, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 10–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.1995.9929209>; UNFPA, "By Choice, Not by Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights and Development" (New York, 2012), [https://guinea-bissau.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN\\_SWOP2012\\_Report\\_1.pdf](https://guinea-bissau.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN_SWOP2012_Report_1.pdf).

appropriate birth rates for societies could reduce population growth and lead to changed consumption patterns and more environmental conservation due to a lessened strain on natural resources.<sup>28</sup> Smaller family sizes also provide women with the opportunity to participate in the workforce, which in turn increases the family income and benefits countries' economies.<sup>29</sup>

Acknowledging women's dual burden as both consumers and providers of health care as well as recognizing the importance of empowerment, education and access to reproductive health is an important example for sustainable development.<sup>30</sup>

### **Women in the workforce**

While men hold the majority of jobs in the manufacturing industry, women in this industry are more likely to be employed in vulnerable jobs (e.g., self-employed or as a contributing family member).<sup>31</sup> This was observed in 26 out of 33 countries with available data; in 21 countries, the share was more than half. Furthermore, these jobs lacked appropriate working conditions and social protection. SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) promotes inclusive and sustainable industrialization, yet export-oriented industrialization strategies left women behind. In Asia and Latin America, for example, women's low wages enabled companies to become internationally competitive.<sup>32</sup> Recently, many developing countries were able to expand their service sector, but well-paid jobs in research and innovation remain dominated by men, while many women are stuck in informal work.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Partha S. Dasgupta and Paul R. Ehrlich, "Pervasive Externalities at the Population, Consumption, and Environment Nexus," *Science* 340, no. 6130 (2013): 324–28, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1224664>.

<sup>29</sup> UNFPA, "By Choice, Not by Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights and Development"; Richard N. Cooper et al., *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change*, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033592>.

<sup>30</sup> Langer et al., "Women and Health: The Key for Sustainable Development."

<sup>31</sup> UN Women, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020."

<sup>32</sup> UN Women, "World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 1999," 1999, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/1999/1/1999-world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-globalization-gender-and-work>.

<sup>33</sup> UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

Globally, however, patterns of informal work are slowly changing. Declines in unprotected or informal work are seen as progress. In Ecuador and Ethiopia, the rate of women working in unprotected employment has declined faster than the men's rate. In Mali, India and Cameroon, where 90 percent of workers work in unprotected work, the rates have changed very little.<sup>34</sup> Since the 2008/2009 Great Recession, informal employment has become more common in developed regions as well. In these countries, informal employment is characterized by temporary, on-call arrangements, or own-account work, whereby workers often don't enjoy the same benefits and stability as regularly employed workers. In OECD countries, women now make up two thirds of employees on involuntary temporary contracts.<sup>35</sup>

Besides inclusive and sustainable industrialization, SDG 9 also aims to foster innovation. Still, in most countries, women are underrepresented in research. Ratios of male to female researchers vary, with Thailand (56 percent) and Venezuela (55 percent) having the highest rates and countries such as Nepal and Togo (10 percent) with the lowest rates.<sup>36</sup> On a regional level, the highest rates of female researchers are observed in Australia and New Zealand (52 percent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (47 percent).

## **Conclusion**

Underrepresentation in research and overrepresentation in vulnerable, informal work exemplifies both the loss of potential and the harm women are subjected to. In order to achieve sustainable development, there is a need to find solutions to issues such as climate change and transforming habitats. Therefore, the global community can not afford to forgo half the world's potential. At the same time, wins in economic development should not be made by exploiting

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<sup>34</sup> UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016" (United Nations, 2015), [https://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW\\_progressreport.pdf](https://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> UN Women.

<sup>36</sup> UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

women's work and should benefit women as well. Otherwise, these gains are not sustainable. Women are both enablers and beneficiaries of sustainable development, and all member states should work together closely to enable and empower women to fill these roles.

Although the goals are clearly defined, the abundance of issues and complexity of women's roles in sustainable development create a challenging environment for finding communal solutions. Hence, the global community should find effective ways to empower and enable women to reach their full potential and participate in economic development. This could be achieved by implementing gender-responsive financing, policies and programmes and gender-responsive processes and institutions in all regions of the world.

#### **Questions to consider**

1. What is the role of women's empowerment in sustainable development?
2. Have you observed setbacks in women's empowerment due to the COVID-19 pandemic?  
How can your country compensate for these negative developments?
3. What is your country's stance on quotas for women in public administration and government?
4. Do women in your country have unobstructed access to the labor market?
5. Is your country planning to implement the SDGs with special regard to gender-specific aspects?

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