

Forum: Second General Assembly

Issue: The question of Gender Inequality and its Impact on Poverty Eradication

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Introduction

Since the start of the 21st century, there has been a decrease in the level of poverty across the globe, from nations both developed and underdeveloped. Humanitarian assistance, education, and providing employment have been major contributing factors to the global effort to eliminate poverty. Despite our progress thus far, there are still 836 million people living in extreme poverty, most of who live in Southern Asia or sub-Saharan Africa on less than \$1.25 a day according to the United Nations. Yet there is still a greater challenge we face: curbing the implications of gender inequality on the eradication of poverty.

One of the underlying problems faced by women living in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDC) is the overall cost of their engagement into waged work. Studies conducted in India have demonstrated that with their wives taking up more financial responsibility for the household, men may come to the conclusion that their financial contribution is no longer needed; the perception of women handling money has come as a source of humiliation. Whereas in comparison in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDC), a recent population survey prepared by the Bureau of Labour Statistics (United States Department of Labour) discovered that the percentage unemployment of men 16 years and over was 0.575% more than woman of the same age range. This hence shows that the impact of gender inequality on poverty should be handled from case to case basis; all with it's own unique solution.

Additionally, the impact of stereotypes, gender-preferred field of study, unequal pay, and gender-biased roles all come into play when considering gender inequality and poverty eradication. The traditional view of women working a full time job as well as taking care of household duties also brings to light why women tend to remain unemployed, and remains as stay-at-home mothers. However, it should not be overlooked that men face similar pressures where the need to receive a stable income can lead to stress and unhealthy living. Hence for poverty eradication to occur, the traditional roles of the men and women need to be reconsidered.

Perhaps one of the best advancements made in trying to solve this issue was the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on the 1st January 2016. In the set of total 17 goals, there are two SDGs that are inked directly with the aforementioned issue: SDG 1 and SDG 5. SDG1 targets the global poverty issue where it strives to eradicate half of the current poverty figures by 2030; ensuring the significant mobilisation of resources; and ensuring that all men and women have equal rights to economical resources. The progress made by UNDP has been so far successful as figures show that the population of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 1.9 billion people in 1990 to 836 million in 2015: a 55.8% decrease in 27 years. In addition, the SDG 5 aims to (5.1) end discrimination of all forms against all women and girls everywhere; promote shared responsibility within the household and family matters as seen nationally appropriate (5.4); and ensure that women everywhere have full and equal opportunities and participation in leadership in all decision-making positions in political, economical and public issues (5.5). These are very important when trying to tackle this issue at the roots and incorporate women into the work force in order to boost economic figures.

Changing cultural norms can be seen as a solution to the eradication of poverty, but there is still an extended list of decisive measures that can be put in place. From the approach of an international perspective, international laws should be implemented where women and girls living in poverty will be able to have the same access to academic education and jobs as their male counterparts. The established laws are not binding, and hence there is no incentive or obligation to meet these supposedly short-term targets. However, from a national perspective, local businesses and the government can also play a crucial role by passing necessary legislation, enforcing implemented laws and providing the essential vocational training for those in poverty. Though poverty can be simply classified as a state in which an individual does not have sufficient funds to sustain a bare minimum quality of life, breaking the cycle of poverty can best be done through education in the long term, through extended effort by both the government and local businesses.

Definition of Key Terms

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs are eight goals produced solely for the purpose of addressing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and lack of appropriate shelter. It does so through imposing measurable time-bound targets whilst simultaneously promote gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. The MDGs do so. At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 countries signed the millennium declaration, which then lead to the development of the MDGs.

Poverty

Poverty is the condition where individuals' basic needs are not being met in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. There are two types of poverty: (1) Absolute poverty is an international definition which occurs when people do not have enough resources to support a minimum level of physical health and is generally classified as living on less than \$1 a day. (2) Relative poverty is dependent on what a specific government classifies as enjoying the minimum level of living standards.

Gender Inequality

Social behaviours and interactions extended to individuals where they are treated differently (usually disadvantageously) on the basis of their gender. Traditional gender roles are based on the concept of gender inequality where a certain gender is assigned specifically to a certain role within society.

Underdeveloped Countries

According to the UN expert panel on the issue, the definition of underdeveloped countries is used to mean countries in which the per capita real income is remarkably lower than the per capita real income of the USA, Canada, Australia and Western Europe. Additionally, it can also relate to a country that has good potential prospects for utilising more capital, labour and available natural resources to support its present population.

Economic recession

This is a period of where there is a general economic decline, which commonly accompanied by a decrease in the stock market, and an increase in unemployment. Recession is generally due to mistakes done in the federal leadership.

Traditional gender roles

These are behaviours that are commonly associated with a certain gender in terms of preferences and abilities in the work force. A simple example would be that women like pink and men like blue. This doesn't have anything to do with their emotional, mental or psychological being but rather solely of their gender.

Background Information

The correlation between gender inequality and poverty has been, for long periods of time, overlooked and not effectively dealt with on an international agenda. This lack of implemented and

enforced action against gender inequality and poverty eradication stems from the cultural, societal and gender norms of many nations and communities. Yemen ranked in last place, 159th, on the 2015 Gender Inequality Index and is seen as one of the countries where women hold only 0.5% of the total seats in parliament and with an underrepresented participation rate of 25.8% in the labour force. Ignoring and avoiding half of the population that could contribute to economic stability and increase drastically reduces the human effort needed to completely eradicate poverty and overcome the stagnated traditional gender roles.

Iceland's parliament was the first to introduce a bill for companies and businesses to record and hold a record of the salary given to all employees. Hence, it can be seen that the remaining countries need a long way to go before the gender pay gap is completely erased. This will be, if the bill becomes official legislation, the first law that is directed to targeting the gender gap on the international stage.

It has been shown that through social protection systems (introduced by member states through SDG1) are fundamental to preventing and reducing poverty and inequality at every stage of people's lives, through benefits for children, mothers, disability/old age pensions and the unemployed. Preliminary data collected in 2016 shows that only 45 per cent of the world's population was effectively protected by a social protection system and that the coverage of these programmes varied from nation to nation. For example, data collected through the SDG1 scheme shows that in 2016, in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand only 10%, and in sub-Saharan Africa, only 22 per cent, of people above retirement age received a pension. Furthermore, in 2016 data showed that worldwide only 28% of people suffering with severe disabilities collected disability benefits; only 22% of unemployed individuals obtained unemployment benefits and only 41% of pregnant women received maternity benefits.

As 2015 came to an end and the MDGs with it, a new 15-year plan was set up to banish some of the worlds' most troubling issues: the SDGs. Not all the MDGs were met and hence the new set of SDGs was unanimously adopted by 193 Heads of State at a summit at UN Headquarters in New York on the 1st January 2016. Gender inequality and poverty persists worldwide, depriving people, especially women, from all walks of life the opportunity to contribute to economic opportunities. Achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and erasing poverty from the global agenda has been a goal of the SDGs and some major breakthroughs have been made through the vigorous efforts of multiple participating member state heads.

As for the emancipation of women, the overall reports of child marriage is declining but unfortunately not fast enough. Data listed in under SDG5 showed that in 2000 nearly a third of women between ages 20 and 24 reported that they were married before the age of 18, whereas in comparison data collected in 2015 showed that this ratio decreased to a quarter. On the topic, the average amount of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work is three times higher for women than for men. The time

spent on domestic chores and care work accounts for the majority proportion of the gender gap in unpaid work. Data collected in unison with SDG5 also showed that globally, women's participation in houses of national parliaments reached 23.4% in 2017, which is just 10% higher than the figures in 2000. This shows the lack of effort put into women empowerment by governments and the lack of programmes to aid in this.

There are many types of inequality that are often overlooked. Educational, political and financial inequality all stem from traditional gender roles that are implanted in societal norms. Women are often seen as the weaker gender and due to this are seen as not being able to make political decisions in high-ranking positions. This contributes to the underrepresentation of women in parliament, as they are often thought as being too emotional in the office, or too busy when it comes to care taking of children. This occurs in both MEDC and LEDC countries. However, something that occurs in majority in LEDC's is the availability of education to both genders. Countries including Cambodia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal all have implanted unwritten societal rules that discourage girls from seeking education. One of the most famous cases is when the Taliban targeted and shot 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai in the head for pursuing her right to an education and is a common occurrence in Pakistan where the education rate for Pakistani women is among the lowest in the world. As a result, Pakistan also has the world's second lowest female employment rate.

Thirdly, the finances in the household are commonly handled by the man, which further decreases the opportunity of women to have first hand experiences with this field. As the sole breadwinner, the man has the right to handle the finances. This is what society teaches us but as women representation increases in the work field, handling finances will become more of a common occurrence.

Contrary to the recessions faced by the United States of America (USA) in the 1960s and 1970s, the recent 2009 recession saw male unemployment rates increase faster than the corresponding female rates. Male age 20+ unemployment peaked at 10.7% while the female age 20+ unemployment peaked at 8.3% showing that contrary to popular believe, males were more likely to be "let go" of their jobs than females. This is important when considering that the world-view of gender inequality is directed mostly towards the female gender, and that this misconception should also be corrected.

Roots of gender inequality in developed and underdeveloped countries

In a recent study conducted by the World Bank from 2011 to 2017, for every \$100 that a man was paid in wages, a woman only received \$76. Additionally, this study came to the conclusion that there is not one country in the world where women are paid the same as or more than men, with New Zealand leading with a 5.6% pay gap compared with South Korea's 36.6%. More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) such as the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the State of Japan also were noted as the countries with the worst paid female employees. It is also important to note that more than 2.5 million people live below the poverty line in the Netherlands and that most of these are single parents living

solely on social assistance benefits. Compared to New Zealand where 682,500 people; 300,000 of which are children, it can be deduced that there is a correlation between gender pay gap and the poverty in the country.

Underdeveloped countries

Generally women tend to have longer life expectancies than men, however due to the little health and education provided for women in LEDCs this advantage is hence smaller in these countries. Additionally, the disparities in employment, decision-making power in marriage and freedom of choice in future decisions also prove to be essential when looking at the poverty in these countries. Due to the lack of education extended to young girls, the probability of them moving onto tertiary education facility is less likely. Hence, women representation in the work force is extremely low and also proves that unmarried women would not have a steady income as so lives in poverty. Additionally, in underdeveloped countries, the main focus in terms of work is agriculture and manufacturing related industries. Since women biologically have less muscle mass, they have a lower chance of being used in these industries which once again turns back to show that poverty is more common in the female population than the male. With a GDP per capita of \$639 and a Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.648 (ranking 149 out of 159), the Central African Republic is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has one of the lowest GII and has 76.3% of its population living below the poverty line, a majority of which are women and children. Hence it becomes clear that to eradicate poverty, the emancipation of women is essential.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

According to government statistics, nearly three-quarters of all unemployed Saudis are in their 20s. This also poses a problem because due to the disparity in gender equality in Kingdom Saudi Arabia (KSA), women stay at home and hence cannot contribute to the overall household income. Some families live on less than \$17 a day, which is considered KSA's new poverty line. KSA's late king, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, invested \$37 billion on wage increases, housing, and unemployment benefits to eliminate the taboo on the subject of poverty eradication in the KSA.

The legislation announced on the 26th September 2017 by KSA which will take effect in June 2018, allows women to drive. This ends a longstanding policy that has been a key factor in the oppression of women in KSA. Saudi leaders have made it clear that the new policy is to increase women's participation in the workplace by allowing labour mobility, and decreasing the proportion of salaries working women spend on drivers. The removal of this ban that has long marred the image of Saudi is hoped by key officials to strengthen its relationship with allies as well as be a step forward for

the eradication of gender discrimination. In theory, this breakthrough will help reduce the level of poverty in the long run and add to the ever-growing economy of KSA.

People's Republic of China (PRC)

In 2015, according to the World Bank, 48.48% of PRC's population was female. The Chinese government contributes this to selective abortion and the under-reporting of female births, but infanticide and abandonment can also play a part. The discrepancies in the gender ratio in PRC, which is mainly male dominated, poses a threat to future marriage structures, where there won't be enough women available for marriage. This could increase the trafficking of women for marriage and continuing high gender ratios at birth. Additionally, this could pose damaging effects for the economy of PRC, where the representation of women decreases and hence certain female dominated jobs such as human resources manager, social worker, counsellor and healthcare, can be negatively affected.

United Nations Women (UNW)

UNW is a section of the UN dedicated solely to gender equality and the empowerment of women and is directed towards Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". It works internationally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls by focusing on five priority points:

- increasing women's leadership and participation;
- ending violence against women;
- engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes;
- enhancing women's economic empowerment;
- and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting.

Latin America

A new report produced by the Latin American Center for Rural Development states that whether a woman can generate her own income in Latin America is related closely to what territory she lives in. This report which was launched on the 6th April 2016 named the Poverty and Inequality Latin American Report 2015 analyses data from multiple countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru and flags economic inequalities in specific locations within countries that not only affects women's quality of life, but also the overall economic development of the country itself.

According to the released report, the territorial location of a woman in a country correlates with whether she is likely to be or to become economically disadvantaged. The report continues by showing that the most women most vulnerable are those living in poor rural communities. Bolivia was highlighted as the country with the greatest territorial equality whereas Guatemala was highlighted as the most

inequitable country in regards to economic advantage. According to the report, possible solutions to this issue included:

- Considering the possibility of including women when designing job training programs;
- When designing policies that will lead to the decrease in employment of women, consider increasing the supply of care centres of infants, children or older adults so mothers/women can go to work;
- Direct actions towards changing gender systems, rather than aiming them only at women;
- Design specific policies for rural areas that will improve women's access to economic resources, such as land

Iceland

Iceland parliament has recently in 2017 created and brought forward a bill that would require by law that public and private businesses, exceeding 25 employees, prove that they offer equal pay to all employees regardless of gender. This bill if passed would be a first for the world. Iceland ranks the highest on the 2015 World Economic Forum's global gender gap index but the new law aims to close the gender pay gap of a nation of more than 323,000 people. Additionally, women take 50% of the seats in parliament, which means that added support of this bill has increased. If businesses fail to provide audits and to obtain the correct certification then they will face fines. Iceland has a booming economy due to tourism and a successful fisheries sector, with growth reaching 11% in the first 3 months of 2017, where before in 2016 it had a full-year growth of 7.2% in 2016. Hence, this new bill could contribute even more to the economic growth.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP helps countries to reduce poverty whilst concurrently achieving sustainable development. Multidimensional poverty, gender inequality and sustainability are targeted by UNDP's integrated approach, all the while the capabilities and opportunities to reduce poverty is strengthened where focus on the most vulnerable population groups is stressed.

UNDP has created a new inequality index, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) which measures the gender inequalities in three important human development areas – reproductive health; empowerment measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats that are held by females; and economic status measured by labour force participation. Overall, it measures the human development costs of gender inequality and hence the higher the GII value to the more inequality between females and males (less human development).

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
October 24th 1945	UN Charter: “Fundamental freedoms for all”
January 8 th 1964	The Declaration of “War on Poverty”
December 18 th 1979	Women’s Bill of Rights (CEDAW)
June 10 th 1963	Congress passed the equal pay act
September 6 th - 8 th 2000	Millennium Development Goals are introduced (Goal no. 3)
January – December 2003	Gender pay gap is at 19%
September 16 th 2015	Microsoft gets a gender discrimination lawsuit
May 4 th 2017	Fox News receives second lawsuit for gender discrimination
August 9 th 2017	Google accused of having systemic sexism in pay difference

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, 30th June 2011 (**A/RES/65/191**)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and is described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes female discrimination, whilst setting up an agenda for national action to end this discrimination.
- Strengthening the institutional arrangements for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women, 20th July 2010 (**2010/7 ECOSOC**)
- Trafficking in women and girls, 12th September 2011 (**A/RES/65/190**) - This is a useful resolution to look at due to the future implications of gender disparities also being relevant to this issue. The less females represented in society, the less future marriages and hence the trafficking of women and girls will become more common for marriage purposes.
- Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, 21st December 2009 (**A/RES/64/216**)
- Legal empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty, 21st December 2009 (**A/RES/64/215**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Multiple countries, namely Nordic/Scandinavian countries, are welfare states and provide welfare benefits and social exclusion housing (for minority groups). As a result these welfare states have some of the lowest poverty rates in the world. Along with this, the Nordic states emphasis a society where

social cohesion and equality are of the utmost importance, whilst simultaneously focusing on economic and gender equality.

The Scandinavian governments not only provide people with the resources needed for basic necessities, but they also provide people with the necessary skills to become fully functioning members of society contributing to economic growth. For example, as in most countries many women do not work because of family responsibilities and the high cost of childcare, but the Nordic states have implemented a system where childcare is free along with homecare for the sick and the elderly. This means that women who mainly stay at home to care for children and families can go to work.

Further attempts include charities and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as The Hunger Project, Oxfam, and the Borgen Project, which directly target the issue of poverty through women-centered approaches or closely working with world leaders. Additionally, food, clothes and other basic necessities have been sent to underdeveloped countries or parts of developed countries to aid in poverty. However, the reason why so many of these projects have not come to completion is due to corruption of corporations as well as there simply being too many people living below the poverty line.

The advances that member states have made towards achieving SDG1 have included the establishment of social protections, which have expanded globally since 2000. As a result over half (51 per cent) of people above global retirement age received a pension for the period from 2010 to 2012. This was followed by data showing that almost all countries have introduced child or maternity benefit programmes.

Possible Solutions

The issue of gender inequality and its impact of poverty eradication is a long ongoing issue that has had many failed attempts. However, three key pillars are needed when looking at tackling this issue: moderating income inequality, closing gaps in education and nutritional health, and tackling prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion. By having gender equality in earnings and household incomes allows women to participate in financial duties and hence helps eradicate gender norms and stereotypes.

In the same way, the improvement of nourishment, education, and healthcare allows individuals of both genders to increase their productivity in the work force and hence contribute to economic growth. This then leads to increase income overall and is a key step in gender equality and poverty eradication. Fundamental interventions are also needed when tackling social exclusion and prejudice, where political intervention in strengthening certain minority groups and eliminating certain social stereotypes and norms is needed. For example, governments being actively involved in increasing the representation of women in the work force, and or giving economic benefits to companies that do increase the economic

productivity. Additionally, companies that are known to worsen in the gender gap can be disadvantaged financially.

According to the SDG1, expanding social protection programmes can further help reduce poverty along with introducing appropriate schemes to the poor and most vulnerable. These social protection programmes mainly include social assistance (e.g. cash transfers, school feeding programmes and targeted food assistance), as well as social insurance schemes (e.g. old-age/disability pensions, unemployment insurance, skills training and wage subsidies).

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/gm/UN_system_wide_P_S_CEB_Statement_2006.pdf (United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women: focusing on results and impact)
This website is useful as it outlines the key strategies and solutions of the UN in fighting against gender inequality and poverty eradication.
- II. http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~sjv340/roots_of_gender_inequality.pdf (The Roots of Gender Inequality in Developing Countries)
This website delves deep into the causes of gender inequality in developing countries and also gives insight into why LEDCs show a wider gender gap than MEDCs.
- III. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Humanity%20Divided/HumanityDivided_Ch7_low.pdf (A policy framework for addressing inequality in developing countries)
Not only does this website outline key solutions produced by the UNDP, but it also expands on the future outcomes of these solutions once implemented.
- IV. <http://www.oecd.org/derec/unitedkingdom/40700982.pdf> (Building jobs and prosperity in developing countries)
This website can be helpful in explaining how jobs can be generated for underdeveloped countries and hence can be used to write possible solutions.
- V. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sintesis-Rimisp-Ing-2015-V4-Completo.pdf> (Poverty and inequality Latin American report 2015)
This website contains the report mentioned in the Latin America section of the “Countries involved section”