The Southern Regional Model United Nations—SRMUN XVII

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 17th annual Southern Regional Model United Nations (SRMUN)! I am Tara Gilliland, and I am overjoyed to serve as your Director for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). To give you a little background on myself, this is my 5th SRMUN conference, and my 2nd on staff. I have also worked for the UNA-USA national conference in New York for the past two years. I graduated from Berry College in 2005 with a degree in Psychology and a minor in Government and am now completing my Master's degree in Autism and Asperger Syndrome at the University of Kansas near Kansas City. My experience and my passions span both subjects of psychology and government, and I am excited to integrate the two working in this committee.

The Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1946 through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to promote women's political, economic, civil, social and educational rights. Discrimination against women and girls has long been a problem across the globe, gravely affecting their psyche, self-esteem and feeling of empowerment. With this, and the SRMUN XVII theme of *Achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals: a Global Partnership* in mind, your Assistant Director, Allen Settle and I selected the following topics for discussion:

> I. Promoting Women in Decision Making Roles
> II. Empowering Women Through Increased Literacy Rates
> III. The Importance of Men and Boys in Establishing Equality and Empowering Women

This background guide will provide you with a good foundation for your research. However, it is in no way all-inclusive of the information available on these topics. Please use this guide and its references as a jumping-off point. We expect for each delegate to be fully prepared for each topic throughout the conference, so please conduct research outside of that which is presented in this background guide.

Also, each delegation is required to submit a position paper prior to attending the conference. It should be no longer than two pages, single spaced, and explains your country's position, policy and recommendations for each of the three topics presented. You can find out more about position paper requirements by visiting the SRMUN website at www.srmun.org. Please email your copy to **Sarah Donnelly**, Deputy-Director General (ddg@yahoo.com) **no later** than **11:59 PM EST October 30, 2006**.

If you have any questions regarding the background guide or position papers, please do not hesitate to contact Allen or myself. We are here as a resource for your conference preparation.

I wish you the best of luck for the next few months, and I look forward to meeting and working with all of you in November!

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History of the Commission on the Status of Women

In the 1940s, few nations in the world provided women with full political and social rights. Therefore when the United Nations was founded it made equality for women an international priority. One of the central goals of the UN Charter is "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women."[1] This goal spurred the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to create the Commission on the Status of Women on June 21, 1946.[2] With a mandate to promote women's political, economic, civil, social and educational rights, the CSW prepares recommendations for the Economic and Social Council. In this role, the body reports to the Economic and Social Council on issues that require immediate action to protect women's equality rights.[3]

The CSW's secondary function is to collect and disperse data on gender issues and has become a major source in the compilation of gender data across the globe. Data compiled by the CSW has played an integral role in developing standards toward women's rights such as in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW).[4] The CEDAW legal standards have provided a legal precedence for women's status in politics, marriage, nationality and reproduction, a method for ending global discrimination against women.

The Commission has also sponsored four global conferences on women's rights within society. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established from the 1975 Mexico City Plan to involve a wide range of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Member States in the empowerment of women and overall gender equality.[5] The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, developed the Platform for Action whose goal was to achieve gender equality by the year 2000 – and its adoption was coordinated and implemented by the CSW. After the conference, the CSW was given the chief role in follow-up coordination, execution and monitoring of the Platform Action by Resolution 50/203.[6]

The Commission on the Status of Women expanded to 45 members from the original 15 over a series of incremental changes placed on the Commission by ECOSOC. The Council is elected in the following regional pattern: thirteen African states; eleven Asian states; nine Latin American and Caribbean states; eight Western European and Other states; and four Eastern European States.[7]

The current Member States of the Commission on the Status of Women are:
ALGERIA, ARMENIA, BELGIUM, BELIZE, BOLIVIA, BOTSWANA, BURKINA FASO, CANADA, CHINA, CONGO, CROATIA, CUBA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, EL SALVADOR, GABON, GERMANY, GHANA, GUATEMALA, HUNGARY, ICELAND, INDIA, INDONESIA, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, JAPAN, KAZAKHSTAN, MALAYSIA, MALI, MAURITIUS, MOROCCO, THE NETHERLANDS, NICARAGUA, NIGERIA, PERU, QATAR, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, RUSSIAN FEERATION, SOUTH AFRICA, SUDAN, SURINAM, THAILAND, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITIAN, UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.[8]

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[1] *Charter of the United Nations*. The United Nations. June 26, 1945.
[2] "Functions." Commission on the Status of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw
[3] Ibid.
[4] "Short history of CEDAW Convention." Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination.
      http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/csw
[5] "About Us." United Nations Development Fund for Women. www.unifem.org/about
[6] "Women." United Nations Economic and Social Council. www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/csw
[7] "Functions." Commission on the Status of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw
[8] "Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women." Peacewomen.
      http://www.peacewomen.org/un/ecosoc/CSW50/UN_Links_Docs_PDF/members-2005.pdf

I. Promoting Women in Decision Making Roles

"In politics if you want anything said, ask a man; if you want anything done, ask a woman."[9]

–Margaret Thatcher, first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were created to move the global community towards the eradication of global poverty, specifically by cutting the number of those in poverty by half before the year 2015.[10] One of the necessary steps towards the complete elimination of poverty is the promotion of gender equality in all aspects of life, including decision-making roles. There has been a continuous struggle by women to receive equal rights and access to power in the political arena. Women's right to vote was not fully recognized in most parts of the world until the early 1900s. Since then, the number of women voting, let alone participating in decision-making roles, has remained low in a majority of countries.[11]

In addition to voting rights, complete achievement of the MDG for gender equality relies upon the equal representation of women within the legislative and decision-making bodies of the world. Traditionally, males have dominated the law-making bodies of the world, accounting for a large portion of those in decision-making roles. The 3rd Millennium Development Goal aims to end all discrimination against women, including raising the number of women who hold political office on the local, national and international levels.[12] Therefore to make this goal attainable, a tremendous amount of work will need to be done in order to change how current political institutions are elected and managed throughout the world. Women also still need to be equally represented and make decisions in a variety of issues that face these governing bodies.

Traditionally, women who are allowed into the political realm are left to discuss matters, which are only related to women and children. As a development goal it is essential that women be given a voice in all political issues in today's world not only because each human being has an innate right to be equally represented in government, but also because each human being has something valuable to contribute to society. The perspective of women is different from that of men, and the melding of these two perspectives together is what will give the world a comprehensive solution to many of the problems we face today.[13]

Definitions of Suffrage

Suffrage is the civil right to vote, or the exercising of that right, sometimes called political franchise.[14] There are many different kinds of suffrage, either extending the right to vote to a particular group, or mandating a type of voting. The over-reaching term of *universal suffrage* refers to the right to vote given to all citizens without regard to race, sex, religion, social status, or any other factor.[15] Most nations still impose restrictions based on age, conviction records and mental capacity, even when they are considered to support universal suffrage. *Equal suffrage* is a term that is often times confused with universal suffrage but has an extremely different meaning. Equal suffrage refers to the removal of graded votes, therefore making the vote of each individual equal to that of another.[16] An example of this term would be in the post-Civil War American South when the vote of former slaves was changed from 1/3 the vote of a white man's to that of a full vote. The opposite of equal suffrage, and what that term is intended to remedy, is *census suffrage*, which is the instance when the weight of a vote cast by some people is not equivalent to the weight of someone else's vote.[17] *Women's suffrage* is the right to vote, specifically for all women, usually

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[9] "Margaret Thatcher." Quote Database. http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/1446
[10] A/Res/55/2. *The Millennium Declaration.* The United Nations General Assembly.
[11] "Women in Politics Statistics." The Online Women in Politics Organization. www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org
[12] Ibid.
[13] "UN Resolution 1325." Peacewomen. http://www.peacewomen.org
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

within an already established political system that has previously given voting rights to men.[18] The ultimate goal of the United Nations is universal suffrage; however, all types of suffrage lead to the achievement of complete enfranchisement.[19] The hope for this committee is that all forms of suffrage will lead to women becoming more active in their political systems, inspiring them to pursue decision making roles.

History of Women in Politics

In the Western World, women received the right to vote and hold political office around 80 years ago.[20] However, individual women began seeking suffrage as early as the 1600s.[21] It was not until the mid-1800s that some countries began to allow women to vote in local elections. The first large-scale organized demand for women's political recognition in the world was in the United States of America, which began in 1848.[22] The goal of this movement, and the others that followed was to establish equal voting rights for women. The suffragist movements used various tactics to achieve these goals. In spite of this, the first country to grant women their right to vote in national elections was New Zealand in 1893.[23] Suffrage in Europe and Scandinavia came about in the late 1910s and early 1920s.[24] During the 1920s, there was a rush by countries to grant women full suffrage. A total of 20 countries participated in this voting rush, including the United States and countries in Scandinavia, Western and Eastern Europe and Northwest Asia.[25] The Latin American region, such as the countries Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico and Argentina granted women the right to vote between 1934 and 1945. Other regions of the world, including Asia and Africa did not grant women the right to vote until much later. One current case of women enjoying the right to vote can be found in Kuwait.[26] In May of 2005, the Kuwaiti Parliament passed a law, which not only bestows the right to vote to women, but also extends female political participation. This landmark occasion gave way to 28 women of 250 candidates running for office.[27]

Each of these suffragist victories did not go without strong opponents. Many men and women from across the globe thought it was not that women did not deserve the right the vote, but that is was unnecessary. They argued that the head of the household, usually the husband was fully able to vote for the entirety of the family, and therefore, it would only make political processes more complicated to add more voters to the pool. They also argued that if the husband and wife disagreed on a particular election, the family unit could be in danger. Another argument against women's suffrage was that women were too emotional to logically consider candidates, and that the "natural-tendencies" of the female would wreak havoc on the governmental systems of the world. In relation to these arguments, there are various religious rationales for the exclusion of women from participating in the political arena.

On December 10, 1948, The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[28] This landmark document guarantees the rights of all people, encompassing a broad spectrum of economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. One such right is defined in Article 21: the right of persons to participate in government and in free elections.[29] This article specifically declares the right of every human to "take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives," which includes election participation.[30] More importantly, section 3 of Article 21 emphasizes that the government shall be based upon the "will of the people" as established in "genuine elections" where there is "universal and equal suffrage."[31] The

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] "Women's Suffrage, Timeline and world Chronology." The Online Women in Politics Organization. www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org

[21] Ibid.

[22] J. Cassidy. *The Status of Women's Suffrage Around the World*. The United States Library of Congress. 1897. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-/query/r?ammem/naw:@field+(SOURCE+@band(rbnawsa+n5852)):@@@REF

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] "Women Vote in Kuwati Poll." CNN. June 29, 2006. http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/06/29/kuwait.elections.reut/index.html

[27] Ibid.

[28] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations General Assembly. December 10, 1948.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

Universal Declaration is recognized as a far-reaching framework for the establishment of human rights across the globe, and the inclusion of universal suffrage only solidified the necessity for all nations to grant voting rights to all people, specifically women, within their borders.

In 1952, the United Nations enacted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which established a comprehensive rule for gender equality in the political arena. Article 1 established an international law of women's suffrage.[32] The convention expresses the entitlement of all women to have the ability to vote on a level playing field with men. The document also establishes a framework for women's political participation by holding elected offices. Both Articles II and III assert that the political field should be open to women without any discrimination.[33] The UN has strongly encouraged all Member States to sign and ratify this document; however, 47 states have yet to ratify this convention, and a large number of countries have expressed specific reservations regarding the text of the convention.[34] Many of these countries aim their reservations towards the respect of sovereignty within each nation and province regarding the role of women in political office. Unfortunately, there are still a few nations that do not allow women to exercise their universal right to vote.

All of these landmark rulings have laid the foundation for the modern movement of women's rights and gender empowerment. In the past thirty years many new conventions, conferences and initiatives have been launched to promote women in decision-making roles and equality in government.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, was created in 1976 by working groups within the Commission on the Status of Women, to "provide the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election, as well as to hold public office at all levels of government (Article 7)."[35] CEDAW established a legal standard for ending all discrimination against women. For the first time a convention specifically stated that women should have a direct influence on creating and implementation of government policy, and that women should be included in all levels and functions of government.[36] It became essential to the CSW mission that CEDAW and each component of this legal standard be effectively implemented across the globe. Despite the enormous precedence CEDAW set, it was not adopted by the UN General Assembly until 1979.[37]

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[32] *Convention on the Political Rights of Women.* The United Nations Secretariat Centre for Human Rights. December 20, 1952.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/index.html
[36] *Convention on the Political Rights of Women.* The United Nations Secretariat Centre for Human Rights. December 20, 1952.
[37] "Women, War and Peace." The United Nations Development Fund for Women. http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=17

The Beijing Platform

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China to create goals and objectives for increasing the roles of women in all aspects of political and cultural life and to note the persisting inequality between men and women in decision-making roles.[38] This was a benchmark occasion for a large number of women to take initiative in creating policy for other women. The document that resulted, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, included many provisions for the establishment of women as decision makers, particularly in calling individual governments, international organizations and private sector institutions to increase the proportion of women in these roles.[39] Delegates fulfilled this desire through one specific platform for action for the United Nations. Participants at the conference determined that a quota system was necessary to support women in decision-making roles in the United Nations.[40] This quota was set at a 30 percent minimum - meaning 30 percent of the seats within the United Nations legislature must be filled by women.[41] The rationale for this quote system was that women cannot be promoted in decision-making roles if they are not fully represented in the organization established to embrace universal human rights and equality.

Security Council Resolution 1325

Understanding the importance of involving women in creating new policies, and wanting to recognize that importance in an international arena, the United Nations Security Council took action on October 31, 2000 by creating Resolution 1325.[42] This resolution instated an international precedent to include women in decisions related to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.[43] Within this document, the Security Council acknowledged that women are not only hugely impacted by conflict, but can play a large role in preventing it through peace-building, and conflict prevention and resolution.[44] The Security Council affirmed that the number of women in security related decision making roles must be increased and that nations must provide training in order to prepare more women for leadership positions than can impact international policy.[45]

Current situation of women in politics

One of the most striking ways to accomplish equality amongst men and women is by introducing more women into lawmaking positions, which can affect a greater number of citizens across the globe. Currently, post-civil war Rwanda holds the record for the largest percentage of women representatives with 48.4 percent.[46] Conversely, women in the Arab sub-region make up only 3.5 percent of the legislative bodies.[47] As of 2003, only 14 countries have reached the 30 percent threshold established in the Beijing Protocol.[48] In 65 countries, women compose only 10 percent or less of the national legislative bodies.[49] However, there has been progress for women in politics, with the number of women in national upper-house legislatures rising from 10.7 percent in the year 2000 to 15.2 percent in 2004.[50] Out of 181 countries, which have national parliaments, 171 of those have at least one woman represented.[51] While this is not ideal, it shows the rising trend of including women in political decision-making roles over the past five years.

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[38] "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/index.html

[39] Ibid.

[40] Annotated Security Council Resolution 1325. United Nations Development Fund for Women. http://www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/Annotated_1325.pdf

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] "Women in Politics Statistics." The Online Women in Politics Organization. www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org

[47] Ibid.

[48] "A Global Perspective: January 2004." Inter-Parliamentary Union. http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/March04.pdf

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

Many countries choose to use quotas for the number or percentage of women as representatives in local, provincial and national legislatures.[52] A quota system requires that women must constitute a certain percentage or number of members of a body, whether that body is a parliamentary assembly a committee, or a government. The basic principle of these modern quota systems is to recruit women to campaign for positions and to ensure that there are no "token women" in a legislative body. In the past, quotas have been set as low as one or two women in an entire body; however, this type of quota was quickly deemed insufficient to represent the ideas of all women.[53] The "critical minority" currently being used to set new quotas in countries is between 30 and 40 percent.[54] Recently, on May 22, 2006, a presidential decree in Kyrgyzstan created a 30 percent representation quota for women in state and local bodies within the country.[55]

Women in the UN System

Even within the United Nations itself, women are greatly underrepresented. Between 1992 and 2002, only 5.4 percent of the Ambassadors to the UN were women.[56] In the same time frame, only 7 percent of delegation heads to the General Assembly First Committee were also women. In spite of these low numbers, on June 2, 2006, the first ever woman was formally elected to the presidency of the UN General Assembly.[57] Haya Rashed Al Khalifa was the one of the first two women in her native country of Bahrain to practice law, and in the year 2000 she served as Bahrain's ambassador to France. In addition to the UN General Assembly's progress, many regions are beginning to open discussion on promotion of women into decision-making roles.[58] Recently, the Pacific Rim nations have come together in a conference to discuss the roles women should play in international agreements regarding a large number of issues, including peace building, environmental policy and international security.[59] This regional community, along with many others has stepped forward to acknowledge the importance of the female perspective in policy making.

Conclusion

While this topic guide focused primarily on women's roles in government it is important to remember that decision-making roles extend outside of the political arena and into the economy or civil society for example. It is equally important to have women making laws as well as running large corporations. Focusing attention on how to get women into these powerful positions will be inspiring for women and possibly stimulate development. Therefore while there is a strong focus on women in political decision-making roles, take the time to consider women in other forms of equally powerful decision-making roles.

There are still steps that should be taken to assure women political equality in all nations; however, there has been significant progress in the past eighty years. Since the 1920s, women have made great strides in the political arena. There have been numerous female legislators, cabinet members and even Prime Ministers. In 1924, Denmark appointed the first woman to a national post as a cabinet member.[60] Sri Lanka elected the first ever female head of state in 1960 with Sirimavo Bandaranaike reaching the position of Prime Minister.[61] And, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher became the first Prime Minister of a European nation.[62] In the fifty years between 1945 and 1995, the percentage of women as members of parliament has increased four fold.[63]

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[52] "Women in Politics Statistics." The Online Women in Politics Organization. www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org
[53] Annotated Security Council Resolution 1325. The United Nations Development Fund for Women. www. UNIFEM.org
[54] Ibid.
[55] Annotated Security Council Resolution 1325. United Nations Development Fund for Women.
    http://www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/Annotated_1325.pdf
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Bahrain's First Woman Diplomat to Lead UN Assembly." Peacewoman. www.peacewomen.org.
[58] "Region: Gender Issues in Peace and Security Policy." Peacewoman. www.peacewomen.org
[59] Ibid.
[60] "Women's Suffrage: Timeline and World Chronology." The Online Women in Politics Organization.
    www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

It is essential that the international community acknowledge the inherent worth of the female perspective in policy building.[64] There has been much progress in the past 80 years for women's political rights, but true equality has yet to be achieved. It is necessary to examine the gender discrimination still occurring across the globe and to create and implement policy that not only rises above these prejudices, but also ends them. Through conferences such as the Beijing +5 follow up, progress can be monitored and new ideas can be discussed. It is up to the next generation of women to complete the work that the suffragists from across the world began 80 years ago.

Committee Directive

This committee must focus on how to get women into powerful positions where their perspectives can be heard and applied. There are many things to consider on this road. In this committee, the delegates will first need to gather information on how their country approaches women's suffrage and women's rights issues. How are women already participating (or not) in your political system? How many women run for and hold seats in your national and regional legislatures? How can women be encouraged to run for office? How can we convince men and other women to vote for female candidates and support women in powerful positions? Are quota systems necessary for women to be placed in decision-making roles, or are there other methods that can be utilized more effectively? After answering these questions, there are those that you should ask your self in regards to the international community as a whole. How can we be sure women are able to contribute to discussion and debate that affect all populations, on all levels from a local city council to a multi-lateral peace building initiative? How can we ensure that the female perspective is heard and truly considered?

II. The Importance of Men and Boys in Establishing Equality and Empowering Women

Introduction

On December 6, 1989, Marc Lépine murdered fourteen female engineering students at École Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.[65] Now known as the Montreal Massacre, the anti-feminist reasoning behind Lépine's attack galvanized Canadians and introduced the white ribbon as a symbol of support against gender based violence.[66] The nature of this incident showed the dissatisfaction some men had with the liberalization of traditional gender roles and the effects of such extreme frustration. [67] Out of this tragedy came a change of focus among feminists and profeminists (male supporters of feminism) to create a redirection from women-only based action to a social policy connecting the empowerment of women with men and boys. While previous conferences discussed the topic, such as the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and the 1997 Meeting of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the issue was not holistically examined until the 2003 Expert Group Meeting in Brasilia, Brazil.[68] From this meeting came general international acceptance that men and boys are integral in creating policies that seek to establish equality and empower women.

Masculinity and femininity are two complex concepts; often described as absolutely opposite.[69] As the word "sex" is a biological term describing genetic characteristics, it is debatable how accurately it describes the numerous roles women take on in different societies.[70] A more appropriate term would be gender, which by definition describes culturally dependent characteristics.[71] Gender is the only human characteristic used cross culturally to designate certain behaviors and roles, despite the complexity of gender roles.[72] In many cultures women are given purview over only domestic affairs, while in other cultures women have more equal power in society in relation to men.[73]

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[64] "Region: Gender Issues in Peace and Security Policy." Peacewomen. www.peacewomen.org
[65] "Case Study: The Montreal Massacre." Gendercide Watch. http://www.gendercide.org/case_montreal.html
[66] "The Campaign." The White Ribbon Campaign. http://www.whiteribbon.ca/about_us/
[67] "Case Study: The Montreal Massacre." Gendercide Watch. http://www.gendercide.org/case_montreal.html
[68] "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality." Womenwatch.
     http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/index.html
[69] Michael S. Kimmel. *The Gendered Society.* New York: Oxford. 2004.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

The Vanatinai of the Trobriand Islands of Micronesia have long had a society described as an "as nearly gender-equal culture."[74] These cultural differences of gender roles provide evidence to oppose the quasi-scientific explanations for female inequality.[75] Studies done by the anthropological community have shown that there is no concrete reason to deny women, or even men, certain rights and responsibilities.[76] Therefore, in any discussion of the role of women in society, policy makers must understand the benefits and limits of certain terminology and the complexity of gender roles in a cross-cultural perspective.

Role Stresses

As most societies in the world are recomposing the role of women in society, great strains have been created, especially among men.[77] Accustomed to having a predominate role in society, many men see the rising equalities of women as a threat to the rights of men.[78] With the rise of inter- and intra-national pressure to empower women, men opposed to equality have begun to respond through violent action[79] or through the formation of men's rights groups.[80] These groups are not to be confused with men's movements, which are usually profeminist in composition.[81]

Much of this stress begins with boys who feel belittled in an educational system when they feel an importance is placed on female education and not their own.[82] In the developed world, boys are doing consistently worse than girls in the educational system, and "boys learn to read later than girls, on average; have more conflict with schools; have a higher drop-out from secondary schooling, and proceed to higher education in smaller numbers."[83] Problems associated with the socialization of boys have mostly been ignored within mainstream educational and political circles.[84] Many have argued for the inclusion of boy-centered educational models, but others have seen this as a way of further separating girls and boys and as a reinforcing mechanism of traditional gender roles.[85] However, the focus among a growing number of education circles has been a greater holistic approach to gender education, through multi-dimensional paradigms and creating a dialogue, which confers upon boys an understanding of the need for female empowerment without making them feel inferior.[86]

Gender Based Violence

Over a billion women, or 1/3 of all women, have been violently attacked, coerced or raped in their lives.[87] While adult men are the predominate perpetrators of violent acts, the conditions leading to such violence often develops in boyhood.[88] Violence is a characteristic fostered among boys from their first years of life. In many societies boys are taught to be aggressive and domineering.[89] Across cultures, boys are encouraged into violent play, from imagined war fighting in young children, through sports and labor in adolescence.[90] Such encouraged violence becomes part of the psyche of boys and men.[91] Furthermore, such violence is reinforced by role models and the

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[74] Karl G. Heider. *Seeing Anthropology.* New York: Pearson. 2004.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf

[78] Ibid.

[79] "Case Study: The Montreal Massacre" Genderside Watch. http://www.gendercide.org/case_montreal.html

[80] "Responding to men's rights groups." XY – Online. http://www.xyonline.net/Respondingtomen.shtml

[81] "The Campaign" The White Ribbon Campaign. http://www.whiteribbon.ca/about_us/

[82] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] "Worldwide Scandal." Amnesty International. http://web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/scandal-index-eng

[88] Jivka Marinova. "Gender Stereotypes and Socialization Process." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP3-Marinova.pdf

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

ever-present bullying which controls the social lives of boys.[92] In warfare, this violence is even more aggressive, especially among the conscripted, and often takes the form of singular and gang rape.[93] In response, some policy makers and organizations have sought a crackdown on bullying in schools, implementing a few programs, which have shown success.[94] Education remains the focus of programs to decrease gender based violence with most advocates arguing for andearlier the better' model.[95]

It is also important to include men in discussions about gender based violence.[96] Fathers play a significant role in how girls and boys feel about gender roles and therefore violence based on those roles.[97] If a father is violent to his wife, than invariably his sons will equate such actions with being a man.[98] Furthermore, fathers often do not associate violence towards women with violence inflicted upon their own daughters.[99] It has been shown that fathers who have daughters connect and often support policies that further greater female empowerment and gender equality.[100] Therefore, some have argued, if fathers connected the emotions they have for their daughters with women in general then men would be less likely to abuse women.[101] When men take the rights of women more personally by connecting the issue with those women close to them, these men will take a greater appreciation for the empowerment of women and equality in society.[102] As men dominate the economic and political landscapes of all societies, a personal connection with the rights of women would have a significant impact.[103]

HIV/AIDS

Women throughout the world, but especially in the developing world, are dramatically threatened by the spread of HIV/AIDS.[104] In many societies culturally condoned gender roles make the threat of HIV/AIDS all the more striking.[105] Without considering the health of women, discussions of equality and empowerment are moot.[106] Women are relegated to a life kept within the home and without significant rights.[107] In many societies wives are viewed as the property of their husbands, unable to deny their husbands sex.[108] In turn, men are raised to seek as many partners as possible and eschew the use of condoms.[109] Sexual coercion, often encouraged by a culture's construction of masculinity, risks alienating women and/or infecting her with the disease.[110] This coercion happens even more during times of crisis such as war, especially in refugee camps.[111] This threat also takes on an economic characteristic as many men work far from home in such industries as mining, and seeks the comfort of prostitutes and homosexual further, further threatening the health of women.[112] As men are taught to be virile and strong, many

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[92] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf
[93] Ibid.
[94] Benedito Medrado. "Men, masculinities, and gender violence" Womenwatch
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/OP3-Medrado.pdf
[95] Jivka Marinova. "Gender Stereotypes and Socialization Process." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP3-Marinova.pdf
[96] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Njoki Wainaina. "The Role of Men in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP4-Wainaina.pdf
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Beril Lindblad. "Men and Boys Can Make a Difference in the Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic." Womenwatch.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/WP4-UNAIDS.pdf
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

men, in developed and developing countries, fail to seek proper medical treatment and fail to get tested for the HIV virus.[113]

In 2000, United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) began a campaign arguing that "Men Can Make a Difference," issuing a movement to take account of men in discussions of HIV/AIDS.[114] Societies' cultural construction of masculinity is particularly important in explaining the HIV/AIDS crisis.[115] Countries that have strongly patriarchal societies have suffered the most from the HIV/AIDS pandemic.[116] Part of this problem is the ignorance that surrounds the disease. Men and boys may not see the connection between their actions and the lives of their partners.[117] Men are also taught to not be overly concerned with caring for others or the home; but, in societies with over a 50 percent infection in adults, the need for men to take a more active role in domestic affairs and support is pressing.[118] Evidence from studies in India show that when married men take jobs doing domestic work, they will likely become more attentive and helpful within their own homes.[119] When men take a more active role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and a more active role in domestic affairs, then women are in turn empowered to achieve in their lives and society becomes more equalized as a result.

Economic Development

Important to any discussion of the empowerment of women is the need for increasing the economic potential of women.[120] In the area of economic development, men and boys play a particularly important role in empowering women and creating more equitable societies.[121] According to the Millennium Development Goals, the world community is resolved, "to stimulate development that is truly sustainable" for women throughout the world.[122] Without considering the role that men and boys can play in the objective to bring development to women, it may be impossible to achieve it.[123]

Since most business leaders in the world are men, it is imperative to open a dialogue with these men.[124] Men often work long hours, leading to little time at home with their families and an increase in stress among both family members and the workers themselves.[125] Businesses around the world are liberalizing their business practices, but many give too many hours to men while limiting the hours for women.[126] Few businesses make gender education a part of the business culture, leading to stagnation in regards to hiring women and giving women equal opportunities.[127] Also, unions often have sexist policies and a lack of gender inclusion; but evidence has shown that unions often improve when women become involved in the leadership.[128]

Governments can also play a significant role in establishing equality and empowering women.[129] Again, with the strong male influence in politics of many countries, there is a defined need to create a dialogue with men in regards

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Njoki Wainaina. "The Role of Men in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP4-Wainaina.pdf

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Dean Peacock. "Men as Partners: Promoting Men's Involvement in Care and Support Activities for People Living with HIV/AIDS." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP5-Peacock.pdf

[119] Radhika Chopra. "Rethinking Pro-Feminism: Men, Work and Family in India." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP12-Chopra.pdf

[120] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf

[121] Ibid.

[122] GA/55/2. *United Nations Millennium Declaration.* United Nations General Assembly.

[123] R. W. Connell. "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality." Womenwatch. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid.

to empowerment.[130] Government leaders often give messages in favor of empowerment but have rarely made empowerment a primary policy goal.[131] A lack of viable paternity leave requirements in most countries reveals a disinterest many political leaders have in the empowerment of women.[132] As a central goal of female empowerment activists, paternity leave would give the mother an opportunity to work, while giving the father an increased share of the burden of child rearing and a greater responsibility over his children.

Even development organizations have been criticized for their lack of taking proactive organizational approaches to women's empowerment.[133] While most developmental organizations include empowerment and equality as part of general policy, many fail to properly enforce their policies due to the needs of general development activities.[134] Structural roadblocks, organizational management and intra-organization relationships often create a barrier for empowerment and equality these organizations.[135]

Conclusion

Discussion on this issue is still preliminary. However, after merely a handful of conferences, meetings and discussions, it has become abundantly clear that men and boys have a tremendous importance in insuring equality and empowering women. Projects in Yemen and studies in India have shown the significance of men and boys in making societies more gender egalitarian. Education remains the singular focus of any policy change and a shift of cultural attitudes towards women and men must be a goal of any international action. Traditional gender roles continue to limit the potential of women in societies, while keeping men in powerful positions. Boys continue to be reared to equate violence with masculinity, leading to the omnipresence of gender based violence in every society. HIV/AIDS threatens people throughout the world, putting a special burden on women. Economic development of women continues to be lackluster, as the business and political arenas are not properly attuned to the need for empowerment of women and equality in society. Men and boys have strong and influential roles in society and their participation in women's empowerment and equality will be critical.

Committee Directive

This topic is extremely theoretical and is often difficult to grasp at even the most basic level. It is absolutely imperative therefore for delegates to be well prepared. First, delegates should become knowledgeable about the basic concepts of masculinity, femininity, gender and gender roles. Delegates should become well versed in the language found in the Beijing Declaration, the documents of the 2003 Brasilia Expert Group Meeting and the Final Report of the Brasilia Meeting. Furthermore, as the topic deals with the culturally constructive concept of gender, delegates should be well versed in the particulars of their nation's cultures and the concerns that may arise because of your nation's cultures in regards to this topic.

Focuses should be on both including men and boys in gender related issues and creating a general framework for the worldwide women's movement which considers the importance and role that men and boys play in empowering women and creating more equitable societies. Delegates should ask themselves the following questions: Have your country's government, NGOs or religious groups taken positive steps on this issue? Of the issues most important to the women in your country, how can men and boys play a role in overcoming these problems and help empower women in your society? Are there any cultural limitations your country has concerning this issue? How do we as the Commission on the Status of Women take the extensive theoretical study of this issue and form it into a reality? What are some ways the genders can work together to empower women, without making men feel inferior?

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] James L. Lang. "Evolving the gender agenda – men, gender, and development organizations." Womenwatch.
     http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP10-Lang.pdf
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

III. Empowering Women through Increased Literacy Rates

"To read is to empower
To empower is to write
To write is to influence
To influence is to change
To change is to live."[136]
-Jane Evershed -More Than a Tea Party

Introduction

Before the late 19th century the term "literate" was defined as a person who was familiar with and well versed in popular literary works. Those who were "illiterate" may have possessed basic reading skills but were not formally educated. In modern times the term literate and its antonym illiterate have taken on a different meaning – functional literacy. Functional literacy is the ability to read and write texts relevant to community and life skills well enough to function in complex society.[137] Functional literacy is essential to interactions in the market place, local business and sometimes recreation.[138] The ability to read is the basic foundation for all formal education programs and advanced economic structures. Therefore, the ability to read and write is not only necessary to the survival of individuals and families in their communities, but is essential to the progress and prosperity of society.[139]

At the turn of the 21st century, 860 million adults around the world were functionally illiterate.[140] Of the current global illiterate population, 2/3rds are women.[141] There are several factors that contribute to this problem. First, young girls' access to primary education, where literacy skills are often developed, has historically been extremely limited.[142] Second, the perception that women are inferior to men encourages the belief that young girls and women do not deserve the same educational opportunities as boys and men do. These cultural and societal attitudes towards women combined with lack of access to education or educational opportunities, substantially increases female illiteracy.

Only recently has there been significant progress towards universal education as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With the signing of the Millennium Declaration, nations acknowledged that universal education and universal functional literacy were crucial to future development.[143] Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2 and 3 both address literacy issues by ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling and that gender disparity in primary and secondary education is eliminated by 2015.[144] The combined efforts of the CSW, the United Nations, other NGOs and government initiatives have drawn more attention to the importance of literacy in the empowerment of women.

Literacy in School

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly.[145] As part of its main objectives, the Universal Declaration guarantees the right to free education for all children, regardless of gender. Unfortunately, today of the 121 million children who are not enrolled in school more than half

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[136] "About Literacy: Remarks from Readers Literacy Quotes." Oregon Literacy, Inc.
    http://www.oregonliteracy.org/aboutliteracy/remarks.php
[137] "Functional Literacy." SIL International. LinguaLinks Library version 4.0, CD-ROM. 1999.
[138] Ibid.
[139] "Literacy and Numeracy." Rotary International. www.rotary.org/programs/service_opportunities/participate/literacy.html
[140] "International Facts." Women in Literacy. http://www.womeninliteracy.org/facts.html
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] *The United Nations Millennium Development Goals.* UN Millennium Development Goals.
    http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/goals.html
[144] Ibid.
[145] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United nations General Assembly. December 10, 1948.

are girls.[146] Gender discrimination is the single most important factor that prevents women and girls from attending and achieving success in school.[147]   According to UNICEF, there are five barriers that prohibit or reduce girls' access to education. These are family poverty, a weak legal framework around education, gender discrimination beginning even before birth, safety and security issues in and around school and dropping out of school because studies are irrelevant to the reality of their future life.[148] In order for girls to overcome these hurdles, each of these barriers must be addressed within the country, region and international community. Therefore access to education, as well as equal educational opportunities, are mutually important in achieving universal literacy and empowering women.

Already there are many programs in place to address literacy and education issues. Both the MDGs and the "A World Fit for Children" Goals aim to eliminate the gender gap in education by the year 2015. The MDGs were established at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September of 2000 in order to establish a set of measurable goals, which are to combat hunger, poverty, disease gender discrimination and illiteracy.[149] Specifically the MDGs aim for the complete primary education of girls and boys and the end of the disparity between genders in primary and secondary education.[150] The United Nations Special Session on Children, which produced the 2002 document "A World Fit for Children," also moved to ensure the closing of the gender gap, focusing on full and equal access to "good quality" basic education for girls.[151] The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has also assumed a leading role to implement programs to increase enrollment and achievement in school by girls.[152] These UNICEF programs usually include public outreach to encourage girls to be enrolled in school, government support for creating increased access policies, discrimination elimination programs and over all encouraging complete and equal access to all forms of education for girl and boy children.[153]

Organized primary education programs will be crucial to forming literacy skills in young girls at an early age. Without a dramatic push for the fulfillment of the MDGs and "A World Fit for Children" goals, many children across the world will not have the opportunity to gain the literacy skills not only necessary to function in adulthood, but to develop their countries and empower their gender.

Literacy at Home

Family literacy is an important concept because through this non-traditional form of education girls and women can be empowered. Family literacy becomes especially important in patriarchal societies where women are viewed as part of the home and may not be allowed to leave it.[154] Programs that focus on family literacy use interaction based activities to educate the family and to also enhance parent-child interactions.[155] While there are a wide range of designs for family literacy programs, there are four core principals that underline all of them: adult basic education, enhanced children's education, parent and child together time and parent resource time.[156] Adult basic education provides parents with the skills necessary to function in society including literacy, language, life and job skills. This component works to enhance the child's educational experience by increasing the academic environment at home.[157] By increasing a parent's interest in education, they will be more actively involved in their child's schooling experience. The third component uses parent and child activity time to improve literacy skills together. An example of activities parents can do with their children to help with this component is reading books together or playing games where questions or other items must be read aloud. Finally, parent resource time is an essential step to

[146] "Basic Education and Gender Equality: The Big Picture." United Nations Children's Fund.
        http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_bigpicture.html
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] *The United Nations Millennium Development Goals.* UN Millennium Development Goals.
        http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/goals.html
[150] *Millennium Development Goals.* United Nations General Assembly. September 18 2000.
[151] A/Res/S-27/2. *A World Fit for Children.* United Nations Children's Fund.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] "Family Literacy." Department of Youth and Community Development.
        http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/cbo-capacity.html.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

enhancing the literacy of the family. This time allows for parents to progress in their own literacy, parenting and personal skills that will in-turn support a learning environment in the home.

Already there have been success stories about programs that focus on family literacy. In Bolivia, the ProLiteracy organization has begun home reading programs with the Quechua women to emphasize bilingual literacy in their native tongue and Spanish.[158] This program has increased the number of adults and children who can read and write in both Spanish and the Quechua language, managing to give women a sense of empowerment without "over-stepping" their traditional gender roles.

Literacy in the Community and Grassroots Programs

It has been argued that grassroots programs are most effective in reaching the most disadvantaged women. The programs are more individualized to specific community needs and can be applied directly. There are many groups, large and small, currently working in areas to increase literacy rates for women.

Rotary International has traditionally supported literacy programs through the building of schools, paying the salaries of teachers who tutor children and adults in literacy skills and donating books and other materials to libraries across the world.[159] Currently, Rotary International is taking on new projects focused on addressing illiteracy in females. They have advocated establishing female-only literacy centers and satellite schools in areas where women and girls have little access to both primary and adult education opportunities.[160] In order to make literacy programs even more accessible, Rotary International has also used grant money to provide childcare for those women who attend community literacy programs.

Two specific programs being implemented by Rotary International groups are in India and Bangladesh.[161] In India, the Navjiot literacy campaign identifies those who are illiterate in the community and workplace and uses tutors to teach them necessary literacy skills.[162] In Bangladesh, the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) has introduced interactive learning programs within the national education system to further develop reading skills of children in school. CLE methods include writing plays and acting them out, singing songs, and dancing. The Rotary International group in Dhaka has sponsored the training of more than 3,000 teachers in CLE techniques.[163]

Another successful global program is ProLiteracy Worldwide. This group combines literacy instruction with education in six critical areas: health, human rights, the environment, peace, education and economic self-reliance.[164] By using these integrated methods, the programs provide community members not only with essential literacy skills, but also with the ability to think critically, problem solve, and initiate community action regarding the six critical areas – thus creating a sense of individual empowerment.[165] Pro-Literacy programs have been established in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas. Each program is tailored to the needs and culture of the represented people group. Programs in Ghana, Ethiopia and South African incorporate literacy tools with important knowledge about HIV/AIDS, in order to provide women with life saving information and skills.[166] When women are educated about their own health through their ability to read they will be empowered to defend themselves in potentially dangerous situations.[167]

In Chile, Domondungo, which means "Voice of the Women" in the native language of Mapudungum, is a group, which aims to teach women of their own human rights and health issues.[168] Using the principles of Pro-Literacy

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[158] Ibid.
[159] "Literacy and Numeracy." Rotary International. www.rotary.org/programs/service_opportunities/participate/literacy.html
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] "International Programs." ProLiteracy. http://www.proliteracy.org/intl percent5Fprog/
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] "Basic Education and Gender Equality: The Big Picture." United Nations Children's Fund.
    http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_bigpicture.html
[168] "Domondungo." Domondungo. http://www.forosalud.cl/forosalud/revista/uploaded/orgvii.htm

Worldwide the Chilean women are achieving essential literacy skills while also gaining important knowledge. Community literacy is indeed an important step to empowerment and addressing development issues.

Empowering through Literacy

The empowerment of women and the promotion of equality between women and men is an essential step in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations and other NGOs have begun a wide variety of projects in order to enhance the standing of women. Many of these programs include micro-credit services, health care seminars and other valuable training to enhance the confidence and feelings of empowerment for women.[169] Empowerment programs also focus on providing literacy skill instruction for women who do not otherwise have educational opportunities. One such program is underway in Uganda.[170]

The Gender Strengthening Program for Eastern and Southern Africa saw that functional literacy programs, which provide students with opportunities to apply and use their new reading, writing and numeracy skills, provide an essential avenue for empowering rural women.[171] Through this program a research study was conducted, providing insight into how women can be empowered to participate in their communities through literacy.[172] The study revealed that, when compared to other programs in the area, projects which combined functional literacy education with credit enhanced women's control over income and finances, and therefore left them with a sense of empowerment.[173] The women also found numerous benefits to literacy education, which allowed for greater successes in the classroom, along with retention of information presented in training sessions. The participants found that their increased literacy skills not only were useful in continuing their education but that they were also able to gain proficiency in useful day-to-day tasks such as controlling pests, improving sanitation and hygiene for their families, care and nutrition of children, and more modern farming techniques.[174]

Finally, this study investigated the role of men in women's acquisition of literacy skills. The study found that men were open to their wives receiving literacy training as long as the wife's skills did not exceed their own. However, even with the achievement of numeracy skills, most men continued to control the household finances. Women participating in the study suggested that literacy skills classes be presented as "business training" courses for men thus encouraging more men to learn literacy skills along with their wives.[175]

Conclusion

The skills necessary to read and write are imperative to the overall function of a woman within society. Without the basic literacy skills and ability to apply those skills to daily life, women will not be viewed as equals in their communities or families. The ability to read, write and understand basic numbers provides a sense of freedom and empowerment that many women do not experience. Throughout the world different literacy programs, whether in the home or in the community, have shown that when women gained functional literacy skills they had more to offer their families and communities. This sense of empowerment will be crucial for the improvement in the status of women and development worldwide.

Committee Directive

The most essential aspect of this topic is how to provide access to literacy education for women. Without equal access to literacy instruction, women will never achieve complete equality with men in commerce, community and family life. There are several avenues in which girls and women can gain access to literacy skill training. First, and foremost, nations must ensure that girl children are enrolled in and are successful in primary school programs. Delegates should understand their country's primary school enrollment practices and the rate of girls in school,

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[169] Ibid.
[170] "Uganda- Empowerment of Women Through Functional Literacy." International Fund for Agricultural Development. www.ifad.org/gender/learning/sector/extension/52.htm
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

including the student retention rate. How can we encourage more girls to be enrolled in school and to continue through primary and secondary education? Should the MDG goal measurements be extended to sufficient make certain girls are included in primary education?

Secondly, how can we ensure that literacy is being encouraged in home life? What programs are available in your country to enhance the learning atmosphere in homes? What else can be done to ensure that women and girls are supported to learn lasting literacy skills within the family unit?

Next, how can women without previous access to literacy education be supported and taught these valuable skills? Are there cultural issues to be overcome before women can be free to learn? How can the international community and your country's government provide essential services to women working to become literate? What types of community programs should be introduced to support women in learning literacy skills?

Finally, and most importantly, how can these newfound skills be parlayed into the empowerment of women? What programs can be combined to make sure that the literacy skills are salient and useful to women and their families immediately and will contribute to development?