



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Dear delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)! Your committee will be staffed by Feodora Chouakri (Director), and Sara Aubé (Chair). Feodora, born and raised in Montreal, is currently pursuing a double major in History and Art History at McGill University. She is passionate about women's rights and hopes to one day conduct research on the topic of women's rights throughout history. Sara, born in Ottawa, is currently completing her final year at Concordia University with a major in Political Science. She shares her Director's enthusiasm for women's rights and through her continued studies in public policy, she hope one day we will see global gender-equal legislation.

The following topics will be discussed by the UNCSW:

1. Link Between Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development
2. Improving Women's Health as a Means to Achieve Gender Equality

The Commission on the Status of Women is an important organization within the UN system in promoting women's and girls' rights, implementing global standards for gender equality, and providing information on the status of women throughout the world. It will be critical for delegates to understand that CSW reports the outcomes and recommendations following its annual session to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and its work is supported by UN-Women.

We hope that you will find this Background Guide useful in your preparation for the conference. You are also encouraged to do your own research to explore in-depth your own Member State's policies. The bibliographies in this document and the CSW website are good starting points.

Each delegate will also be required to submit a Position Paper before **16 February 2017** to csw@canimun.org. Guidelines and requirement are available on CANIMUN website under the Delegates Resources section.

Prior to the conference, make sure you review our Rules of Procedure and Delegate Code of Conduct, both of which can also be found on our website.

If you have any questions regarding the committee or the conference, feel free to contact us.

We wish you all the best in your preparation and look forward to meeting you at CANIMUN 2017!

Feodora Chouakri
Director

Sara Aubé
Chair

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal intergovernmental body of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The CSW is a functional commission reporting to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) on an annual basis. The Commission first met in 1947 and has since been holding annual meetings. At its inception, the CSW comprised 15 Member States all which were represented by women; in other words the delegations were composed entirely of women. Non-governmental organizations holding consultative status within the UN ECOSOC have developed a close relationship with the CSW and are invited to participate as observers.¹ According to UN Women, “NGOs [are] critical components of the Commission on the Status of Women [and] have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women’s empowerment and gender equality [...] They continue to play an important role in holding international and national leaders accountable for the commitments they made in the [Beijing Platform for Action].”²

The Commission participated in the drafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) by raising awareness on women’s issues as well as introducing more inclusive language addressing men and women. Fighting against discriminatory legislation was also an important role of the CSW.³ The codification of women’s legal rights needed to be supported by thorough analysis of women’s situation throughout the world which the CSW achieved by conducting extensive research and painting detailed pictures of women’s status in each country.⁴

The CSW began drafting international conventions on women’s rights, such as the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* (1953), which was the first document to address women’s political rights; the *Convention on the Nationality of Married Women* (1957), addressing women’s rights within marriage; and, finally, the *Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration for Marriage* (1962), which also addressed women’s rights pertaining to marriage.⁵ In 1951, the CSW participated in the drafting of the Labour Organization’s Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, bringing about the popularity of the concept of equal pay for equal work.⁶

In 1963, the United Nations General Assembly mandated the CSW to draft a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which the General Assembly adopted in

¹ “Commission on the Status of Women” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

² “NGO Participation” *UN Women*, Dec. 20 2016.

³ “A Brief History,” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*

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1967.⁷ The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979) was a legally binding document produced by the Commission and one of the foremost important document on the topic of discrimination against women. In the subsequent years, the Commission concentrated on women's situation in rural areas as women had been disproportionately affected my poverty.

The 25th anniversary of the Commission was marked by the First World Conference on Women which was held in Mexico City. The following decade became the "UN Decade for Women: Equality Development and Peace."⁸ In 1980 another world conference was held in Copenhagen and a third was held in Nairobi in 1985. During the 1980s, the CSW helped bring attention to the issue of violence against women and the General Assembly adopted in 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.⁹ The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which the Commission on the Status of Women has since been discussing annually and ensuring the efficient implementation of the suggested measures in all countries.

Finally, in the 2011, the various branches of the United Nations addressing women's issues, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), merged to become UN Women.¹⁰ The CSW operates within UN Women which leads initiatives in leadership and political participation, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, peace and security, humanitarian action, governance and national planning, the sustainable development agenda, and HIV/AIDS.¹¹

Governance, Memberships, and Organization

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is governed by UN Women, which serves as the secretariat of the Commission. The Bureau of the Commission facilitates the preparation for the annual meeting of the Commission. Bureau members serve for two years, with the 61st session comprising the following members: H.E. Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil), Chair; Ms. Fatma Al Zahra Hassan (Egypt), Vice-Chair; Ms. Šejla Đurbuzović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Vice-Chair; Mr. Jun Saito (Japan), Vice-Chair; and Mr. Andreas Glossner (Germany), Vice-Chair.¹²

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ "A Brief History," *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ "What we do," *UN Women*, Dec. 20 2016.

¹² "Member States," *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

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There are 45 Member States of the United Nations that are seated at the CSW at one time. The members are elected by the ECOSOC which ensures equitable geographic distribution. There are, in total, “13 members from Africa, 11 from Asia, nine from Latin American and the Caribbean, eight from Western Europe and other States, and four from Eastern Europe”¹³ all of which are elected for a period of 4 years.¹⁴

Non-Governmental Organizations are an important component of the CSW. However, they can make a limited amount of interventions during interactive panels and only a limited number of NGOs are authorized to make oral interventions if time permits, with “NGOs speaking about the priority theme, on behalf of groups of organizations, or coalitions” given priority¹⁵. Furthermore, in order to send representatives at the CSW, NGOs must be accredited by the ECOSOC and be in good standing within the United Nations.¹⁶ In fact, NGOs primarily “organize and attend parallel events held outside UN premises.”¹⁷

Mandate and Functions

UN Women explicitly states the mandate of the CSW, which is “instrumental in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.”¹⁸ In 1996, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations expanded the mandate to include “the monitoring and reviewing progress and the problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities.”¹⁹

The CSW holds annual sessions during which “representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather in New York [in order to] discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality, [...] as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women.”²⁰ Furthermore, the Member States “agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women’s enjoyment of their rights in political, economic and social fields.”²¹ The outcome and recommendations of each session is reported to the ECOSOC.²²

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ “Opportunities for NGOs to address the Commission,” *UN Women*, Dec. 20 2016.

¹⁶ “Eligibility,” *UN Women*, Dec. 20 2016.

¹⁷ “NGO Participation” *UN Women*, Dec. 20 2016.

¹⁸ “Commission on the Status of Women” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

¹⁹ “Commission on the Status of Women” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Ibid*

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The ECOSOC has outlined the methods of work of the CSW in resolutions 2006/9, 2009/15, and 2013-18. Amongst other things, during each session the Commission:

“engages in general discussion on the status of gender equality, identifying goals attained, achievements, gaps and challenges in relation to implementation of key commitments; focuses on one priority theme, based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly; convenes interactive panel discussions on steps and initiatives to accelerate implementation, and measures to build capacities for mainstreaming gender equality across policies and programmes; addresses emerging issues that affect gender equality; and agrees on further actions for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women by adopting agreed conclusions and resolutions”.²³

In other words, the Commission’s work is limited to the discussion of themes explicitly related to women’s and girl’s rights in perspective to the Beijing Platform for Action which is used as the main reference document for the work of the Commission.

Recent Work and Upcoming Challenges

Since 2010, the Commission has addressed various themes in relation to the effective realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Some of these themes include: the elimination of violence against girls; the promotion of women’s access to equal work as well as women’s access to education, science, and technology; the empowerment of rural women; the empowerment of women within the sustainable development goals, as well as women’s status in the post-2015 agenda²⁴.

CSW 61 will be discussing “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”²⁵ as well as reviewing the “challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session).”²⁶ The Commission’s work for the upcoming years will center around the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

²³ “Commission on the Status of Women” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ “CSW61” *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

Conclusion

The Commission on the Status of Women has effectively addressed multiple issues pertaining to women's rights as well as drafting relevant framework which has served to shape international legislation concerning women's rights. Much of the advancement made for women's rights have been supported and spearheaded by the Commission and UN Women which both continue to actively discuss and fight discrimination against women worldwide. Women face multiple challenges, as stated by UN Women Deputy Director and Assistant Secretary-General Lakshmi Puri in a speech delivered at the UN Women National Committees' Meeting in 2011, including the feminization of poverty, stagnation of economic growth and empowerment, and stifling of women's voices, as well as suffering "even more due to natural disasters, climate change, environmental stress, food, fuel, health and economic crises as they bear the burden of care-giving, for example, in the case of HIV/AIDS."²⁷ In other words, there is still a long way to go in the process of women achieving equal rights and UN Women along with the CSW must play a primordial role in this achievement.

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The Member States of the CSW are important and essential to the functioning of the Committee. In order to adequately understand the inner workings of the CSW, it is important to understand its composition and the procedures related to the election of member states.

"NGO Participation" UN Women, Dec. 20 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/ngo-participation>

NGOs play an important role within the CSW that has been established through their work in the field of gender equality and women's rights. NGOs are essential to the CSW while holding a special place within the committee that must be understood in order to grasp their role and importance as well as their impact within the committee.

²⁷ Lakshmi Puri, "Accelerating Gender Equality Worldwide: A challenge for UN Women," (speech delivered at the UN Women National Committees' Meeting, Sydney, Australia, 5 September 2011).

“Outcomes” UN Women, Dec. 20 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/outcomes>

The outcomes of each CSW session shapes the following year’s session it is therefore important to research previous outcomes of the CSW. The outcomes are also useful in understanding the dynamic of the CSW which often looks for unanimity within the committee.

Puri, Lakshmi. “Accelerating Gender Equality Worldwide: A challenge for UN Women.” Speech delivered at the UN Women National Committees’ Meeting, Sydney, Australia, 5 September 2011.

Lakshmi’s address is important in terms that it poignantly addresses the systemic root of gender inequality. She explains that the lack of gender equality in the health care system stems from a much more extensive and indoctrinated tradition of gender inequality and discrimination.

“Woman and Health” UN Women, Nov. 6 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women/2014/health>

Facts and figures of women’s health are important in the understanding of the subsequent background guide’s topic as it outlines the significant discrepancies between men and women on the topic of health care services.

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TOPIC 1: LINK BETWEEN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

In June 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20, attended by 192 UN member states, welcomed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Major calls were made for the strengthening of national, regional and international policies and priorities, with multilateral regional and international organizations contributing more towards sustainable development (reducing poverty while preserving the environment). Women's empowerment and participation in its implementation is necessary, as recognized by the UN Member States. To understand the foundation of Agenda 2030, we must first look at the definitions of *sustainable development* and *women's empowerment*, and realize their critical link by analyzing how women are adversely affected by the unsustainable practices in our world in the economic, societal and environmental spheres of their lives. The World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) published a report in 1987 that defines the concept for the approach to sustainable development as that "which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs"²⁸. The concept promotes strong economic and social development, particularly for people living in poverty, who are the most affected by environmental degradation and a lack of access to natural resources.

The empowerment of women is defined as "the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices"²⁹. Women support the family through wage labour, preserve traditional knowledge, maintain environmental biodiversity and ensure household food security and nutrition. Despite these critical roles, women and young girls continue to suffer the effects of poor healthcare, education, and discriminatory policies.³⁰, this being the result of women enduring the burden of unpaid work and a lack of legal protections. The undervaluation of women is widespread across economic, social, political and environmental spheres of life. Higher levels of education and economic sustainability of women has the greatest potential to reduce poverty while striving for a sustainable future. Research has demonstrated that women's participation in the labour force helps the economy grow significantly; if the wage gender gap was to be eliminated, the US's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be approximately 9% higher, Europe's GDP would be 13% higher, and in 15 major developing countries, their economies would boost

²⁸World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Sustainable Development – concept and action*

²⁹Getaneh Gobezi, (2011, September 20-23), *Empowerment of Women and Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Microfinance*, p.6.

³⁰Robert Engelman and Jill Sheffield. (2012, June 11). *The Critical Role of Women and Sustainable Development*

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citizens' per capital income by 14%-20%³¹. As the world population reaches 7 billion people, women can no longer be dependent on their on others to live an independent life and raise their families, while contributing to a sustainable world for future generations to come; outlining the importance attached for women to gain access to universal reproductive health in order to reduce maternal mortality. Women's empowerment to be socially and economically independent is crucial for the sustainability of the environment; according to research by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, women produce 50% of agricultural output in Asia, and represent nearly 80% of the agricultural labour force in Africa. If women were granted the same level of access to agricultural resources as men, "production would increase by 20-30%, and has the potential to reduce the number of the under-fed population in the world by 12-17%³²". If international community were to meet women's needs to "plan the number and spacing of their pregnancies, population growth would slow and global carbon emission would decrease by 8-15 percent – the equivalent of stopping all current deforestation"³³. Moreover, the impact of climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and girls through fluctuating commodity prices and natural disasters, including draught and famine. The link between women's empowerment and sustainable development is a complex and multi-faceted issue that must be reformed in all spheres of a woman's life: the economic, social and environmental. It is thus essential to encourage women's participation in decision-making at a national, regional and international level in order to enhance the basis for rapid progress, including stronger laws, policies and institutions, better data and scaled-up financing. The following sections will outline the major international documents that lay the foundation for action on sustainable development, as well as the role of the international system in ensuring the gender-equal implementation of the SDG's.

International Framework

Assuring women's rights through legal frameworks is the first step in guaranteeing the eradication of gender-based discrimination. According to a Report of *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals* produced by the United Nations Secretary General, as of 2014, 143 countries recognized the right of equality between men and women in their constitutions through the equal recognition of men and women, prohibition of discrimination against sex, and many more.³⁴ The international community made a great stride in the protection of women against discrimination through Article 7 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948).³⁵ However, the UDHR lacks enforcement mechanisms to ensure its compliance, requiring more substantive protection for women. A

³¹ UN Women. (2013). *Economic Empowerment of Women*.

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2016). *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women*.

³³ Kavita N. Ramdas, (2011, October), *What's Good for Women Is Good for the Planet*, p. 2.

³⁴ UN Secretary-General. (2016, June 3). *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*, p. 14.

³⁵ United Nations General Assembly. (1949, December 10). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

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legal instrument of extreme importance to women's equal rights is the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979). The Convention is often described as an "international bill of rights for women" and is the most comprehensive treaty on the rights of women.³⁶

In January 2016, the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals or Agenda 2030 for Development, replaced the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) as the new universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 Targets seeks to build on what was unaccomplished by the Millennium Development Goals, a source of guidance and a framework for future development for all UN Member States. When the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 70/1, women's inclusion in its implementation was necessary. These issues are seen as "integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental"³⁷ for men and women. The SDGs are attempting to change the course of the 21st century by addressing key challenges relating to poverty, inequality, and violence against women. Women's empowerment to influence the implementation of the 17 SDG's is a pre-condition for this to be realized.

The source of guidance for UN Member States on action for woman's empowerment stems from The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995), which launched the concept of gender mainstreaming and flagged 12 areas where urgent action is needed to ensure gender equality and equal opportunities for men and women. It strives for the effective implementation of a global policy framework and blueprint for action for the advancement of women as well as removing all obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share of economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making.³⁸ The current framework for the achieve of women's empowerment is **Sustainable Development Goals 5 (SDG5)**, which is aimed at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls across the globe³⁹. SDG5 is the ultimate goal is ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere⁴⁰. It focuses on the elimination of all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and child in the public and private spheres. Providing women and girls with equal access to education; universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; recognizing the value of unpaid care and domestic work; as well as representation in political and economic decision-making⁴¹. Women and girls must be ensured a platform to voice their

³⁶ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). (1981, September 3). *Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.

³⁷ UNGA. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. p.1.

³⁸ The Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995, September 15). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

³⁹ Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. (2015). *Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*.

⁴⁰ Sustainable Development Goal 5 (2015)

⁴¹ Sustainable Development Goal 5 (2015)

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grievances and concerns to enable their independence, which is central to attaining a sustainable economy, society and environment for future generation.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all UN Member States of the UN General Assembly have committed themselves to the Agenda. Member States have agreed to conduct country-led and country-driven reviews of progress made at the national and sub-national level, which must take into account the contributions from “indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities”⁴². At the global level, the Economic and Social Council will carry out regular reviews of the agenda in an attempt to provide a platform for partnerships through major groups of civil society and other stakeholders. Other major UN organs work towards the gender-equal implementation of the SDGs.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was established in 2010 by the UN General Assembly, in which it is focused exclusively on gender equality and women’s empowerment. UN Women works to support inter-governmental bodies, such as the CSW, in the development of policies and standards; help member states to implement these standards and provide technical and financial support in order to forge effective partnerships with civil society, and take a leading role to coordinate the UN’s activities to achieve gender equality, as well as promote accountability through regular monitoring.⁴³ UN Women, very importantly, manages the *Fund for Gender Equality*, a global grant-system that provides technical and financial support to high-impact, innovative initiatives from women-led civil society organization that demonstrate effective results in aiding women and marginalized groups. The fund has delivered grants of USD \$64 million to 120 grantee programmes in 80 countries, impacting the lives of more than 10 million direct beneficiaries.⁴⁴

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Each year, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) holds a session to discuss, specifically, the annual priority theme of the Beijing Declaration and its enhancement through the implementation Agenda 2030 (SDGs). The CSW’s 60th session in 2016 discussed the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and analyzed the progress that needs to be made in eliminating violence against women and girls. Following the CSW’s 60th session, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) President Mogens Lykketoft suggest the CSW serve as a “watchdog” to ensure that implementation of the 2030 Agenda contributes to gender equality. The CSW is to “provide guidance on reforms and policies [...] and to remind governments that gender equality will require action on all of the SDGs, not just Goal 5”⁴⁵. The meeting concluded with agreement on foundations to

⁴² Alessandra Nilo. (2015, November 1). *Civil Society & Other Stakeholders*, p.4.

⁴³ United Nations Women. (2016). *About Us*.

⁴⁴ UN Women. (2016). *Fund for Gender Equality*.

⁴⁵ Catherine Benson Wahlén. (2016, March 15). *CSW 60 Opens with Calls for Gender Equality to Guide Action on SDGs*.

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accelerate action for all women and girls: for enhancing the basis for rapid progress, including stronger laws, policies and institutions, better data and scaled-up financing. The CSW also spoke of the importance of “youth agreed conclusions” at the at end of CSW60, in which implementation of the SDGs must be “guaranteed to be anchored in young people’s interests acting in their own authority and ensuring their meaningful participation in influencing the implementation of SDGs,”⁴⁶ which helped constitute the Youth CSW Taskforce.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), during World Water Week, highlighted that the opportunity cost from a lack of access to water, and the amount of time and effort it takes for women to collect water.⁴⁷ UNICEF has created the Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2014-2017 to specify how they will endorse gender equality in all of their organizations and all levels, in coordination with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017⁴⁸. Strong reliable data is central to the SDGs implementation, as noted at the 6th Global Forum on Gender Statistics, which highlighted ways to improve data on gender in order to support better policies for women and girls and SDG 5. The focus on the best practices and challenges for the collection, production, dissemination, and use of gender statistics, as well as an opportunity to review data availability and persisting gender data gaps.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in March 2015, the United Nations Statistical Commission created an Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs), mandated with developing an indicator framework for the achievement of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for enhanced monitoring for the enforcement of gender equality requirements and female empowerment⁵⁰.

A global movement that has guided civil society and other stakeholders is *Every Woman Every Child*, headed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, provides platform for guidance an action for partnership organizations of the SDGs.⁵¹ Civil society groups such as the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB) and Malaria, Amnesty International, Give a Child a Family (GCF) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)⁵² to name a few, are major civil society groups working in localizing the sustainable development goals and implementing them with gender-equal policies. The outcome of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development “Agenda 21” recognized nine (9) key sectors of society as the main channels through which

“Citizens and people could organize and participate in the sustainable development processes which include: *women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental*

⁴⁶ Lakshmi Puri. (2016, March 12). *“A high-five for gender equality and SDG 5” – Deputy Director Lakshmi Puri.*

⁴⁷ United Nations News Centre. (2016, August 29). *At start of World Water Week, UNICEF highlights how girls lose time collecting water.*

⁴⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2014, June 3-6). *UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2014-2017.*

⁴⁹ United Nations News Centre. (2015, October 25). *UN statistics forum addresses effort toward gender equality.*

⁵⁰ United Nations Statistics Division. (2015, March 6). *Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators.*

⁵¹ Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. (2016). *Partnerships for SDGs: Every Woman Every Child.*

⁵² Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. (2016). *Partnerships for SDGs: SDG5*

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*organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community, and farmers*⁵³.

Given the major contributions to Agenda 2030 of civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, human rights defenders and girls' and youth-led organizations, the Commission welcomed open engagement and cooperation with them in gender-responsive implementation. The Global Advisory Group was formed to enhance the depth of civil society networks. Nominated members include leaders of grass roots, rural and community-based groups, and indigenous peoples' organizations; scholars; activists and male advocates for gender equality and women's rights.⁵⁴

Gender Mainstreaming

Much has been achieved since the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Agenda 2030*, but progress has been slow and uneven, particularly for the most marginalized women and girls who experience various complex and intersecting forms of discrimination, which can be based on ethnicity, race, religious, and sexual orientation amongst other things. An ongoing initiative of the United Nations as a method of achieving universal gender equality is through the strategy of **gender mainstreaming**:

“The process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences and integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality”⁵⁵.

Various strategies have been employed to incorporate gender perspectives into national policies such as gender-based analysis during the design of policies; policy evaluation to assess if it has promoted gender equality; gendered-data collection to assess the impacts of policies on women and men; a gendered-budget where the government's equality commitment translates into budgetary commitments.

Analyzing the obstacles faced by gender mainstreaming by UN Member States is best demonstrated when it was first launched in 1996 in order to promote gender equality for policies of the European Union.⁵⁶ The concept of gender mainstreaming was initially fully endorsed by policy-makers, but its implementation was manipulated so that it served to counteract an increasing demand for positive action measures in various institutions

⁵³Alessandra Nilo. (2015, November 1). p.3.

⁵⁴ United Nations Women. (2016). *Civil Society Advisory Groups*.

⁵⁵ Economic and Social Council. (1997, September 18). *Gender Mainstreaming*, p.2.

⁵⁶ Maria Stratigaki. (2005, May). *Gender Mainstreaming vs. Positive Action*, p.165.

responsible for their realization. Traditional gender systems and social roles of women are established in different socio-cultural contexts, which determine what is expected, allowed and valued. The phenomenon of prejudicial female stereotyping is a multi-faceted issue that has the potential to be translated through various means: language and vocabulary, laws and practices, societal attitudes, justice systems, media and education, various institutions and public authorities, enterprises and in the individual.⁵⁷ Empowering women through egalitarian legislation may have similar effects to political empowerment, allowing women to be more adequately represented on the decision-making spheres of national institutions and organizations and bring about legislative change that both women *and* men want. By prioritizing women and children during emergencies, humanitarian responses would take increased measures to address sexual and gender-based violence, such as the increased casualization of female workers and feminization of poverty, trafficking, and violence against women in the domestic sphere and work place.

Conclusion

Coordinated support amongst UN member states is imperative to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; this will require mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda at the national and local level and integrating it into all plans for sustainable development, and subsequently into budget allocations. The acceleration of national and international resources to priority areas of focus in the mainstreaming process, paying special attention to their commitment and accountability. Lastly, policy support by various UN agencies to ensure they are implemented efficiently and in a timely manner. In conducting their research, it is important to consider the following questions:

- Have international bodies and local governments been effective in implementing gender-equal policies into their national mandates?
- How can the CSW ensure that appropriate enforcement of the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG5?
- What role do women play in their economic, social and environmental empowerment? How can it be improved?

⁵⁷ Puri Lakshmi. (2011, June 13). *Countering Gender Discrimination and Negative Gender Stereotypes: Effective Policy Responses*.

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The European Parliament report on women's empowerment and sustainable development provides an accurate overview of the concepts pertaining to Sustainable Development Goal 5. The report provides resourceful statistics on the benefits that women's economic empowerment would produce to help ensure a sustainable future. As this report outlines the correlation and motivation of the various organizations (Commission on the Status of Women) and international documents utilized (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Agenda 2030) in developing SDG5. Delegates should consult this document to review the framework and parties involved in accomplishing a sustainable future through the empowerment of women.

UN Women. (2014). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome*. Retrieved from http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf

UN Women produced a comprehensive document explaining the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which is the foundation for 2016 priority theme of action for the CSW. The report also provides information on the Beijing+5 where they reflect on what has and has not been accomplished since the Platform's implementation in 1995. This source will be useful for delegates to understand how the United Nations has faced obstacles for implementation of policies to women's empowerment and gender equality. Furthermore they recommended actions and initiatives to enforce all aspects of the Beijing Platform such as faster implementation and global realization, better financing and enhanced data.

UN Women. (2001.) *Gender Mainstreaming*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>

A focal point UN Women's work is gender mainstreaming, in which the entity provides an explanation of the importance of this strategy. This source provides the progress report by UN Women on the support for gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations. It provides an analysis of the roles and responsibilities, measurement and development tools, and monitoring and assessment for the impact on gender mainstreaming on society.

UN Women. (2013). “*Economic Empowerment of Women* [Policy Brief]. Retrieved October 28th, 2016 from <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women-ee-thematic-brief-us-web%20pdf.ashx>

The report provides statistics and further information on the benefits on women’s economic empowerment and its impact on the environment. This source provides a more profound understanding of the enormous contribution women make to the economy. Delegates should consult this source in understanding how women’s economic empowerment is essential and can contribute to women’s environmental and social empowerment. It provides case studies outlining the progress of increasing women’s economy autonomy and power.

UN Women. (2016). International Instruments and Treaty Bodies [Website] Retrieved October 20th, 2016 from http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/instruments_treaties_1003.htm

UN Women produced a database, which lists the major international instruments and legal bodies aimed at gender equality and enhancing women’s rights. The directory of UN resources on gender and women’s issues provides relevant international standards, that which delegates should reference when assessing how to formulate policies that can be implemented globally. This source provides important sources for women’s rights (i.e. CEDAW) to recognize what action has been taken to empower women through gender equality, and the procedures they have used. Delegates should reference these international documents to assess how they can be better enforced.

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TOPIC 2: IMPROVING WOMEN'S HEALTH AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

Introduction

Women's health is a crucial factor in the achievement of gender equality. In fact, women often fall victims to poorer health care which subsequently prevents them from achieving personal realization and actively participating in society. There are multiple health factors that severely affect women and girls, such as female genital mutilation, foeticide, child marriage, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, and violence. Facts pertaining to the aforementioned health risks reinforce the necessity for improvement of women's health, specifically in rural and developing regions. For example, "133 million girls and women have experienced genital mutilation"; "1 in 3 women have experience physical or sexual violence"; "HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide for women of reproductive age, while also only 67% of pregnant women living with HIV receive antiretroviral medicines"; "in 2013, nearly 800 women died daily from maternal causes, 99% of these cases occurred in developing countries"; "cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death worldwide for 1 in 3 women, however, gender bias, including by healthcare providers, can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment-seeking"; and "in sub-Saharan Africa, 74% of all years of life lost among women are due to infectious diseases and maternal, neonatal, and nutritional causes, while in high-income countries, this only account for 8% of all years of life lost among women".⁵⁸ Furthermore, 41.8% of pregnant women suffer from anemia due to chronic undernourishment, while 45% of child death is linked to malnutrition. Finally, child marriage is a significant health risk for young girls whose bodies risk higher incidence of disease and maternal mortality. In the subsequent sections of this background guide, International Framework as well as the Role of the International System will be discussed pertaining to women's health rights and gender equality. Furthermore, Maternal Mortality Rate will be touched upon in order to illustrate the health care discrepancy between men and women placing specific emphasis on Indonesia through a case study of Maternal Mortality Rate and the state's efforts and limitations in eradicating it.

International Framework

The Beijing Platform Declaration and Platform for Action is the principal international framework addressing women's health. The declaration outlines five strategic objectives pertaining to women's health: "Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services"; "Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health"; "Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and

⁵⁸ "At A Glance" A Lifecycle of Health Risks," *UN Women*, Nov. 5 2016.

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reproductive health issues”; “Promote research and disseminate information on women's health”; and “Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.”⁵⁹

Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have addressed women's health through Goals three and five. Goal 3 of the SDGs is to “ensure healthy lives and promoted well-being for all ages”⁶⁰, with maternal and child health being at the forefront of this goal. In fact, Goal 3 targets, which must be achieved by 2030, include, amongst others, the following: “[reducing] the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births; [ending] preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births; [ending] the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable; and [ensuring] universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.”⁶¹

Goal 5 specifically targets gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Many of the specific targets of this goal address women's health such as: “[Eliminating] all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; [Eliminating] all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; [Ensuring] universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.”⁶²

Both the SDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action have been at the forefront of the discussion of women's health both putting specific emphasis on women's reproductive and sexual health which is essential to the achievement of gender equality.

Role of the International System

UN Women has launched various projects and initiatives in order to raise awareness about the importance of women's health, and address violations of women's right to health. UN Women has worked across the globe in order to remediate to the problematic.

⁵⁹ “Platform for Action: Women and Health Diagnosis,” *The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁶⁰ “Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,” *United Nations*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² “Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” *United Nations*, Nov. 6 2016.

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The World Food Programme launched initiatives which trained rural women as nutritionists, which tackled the issue of malnutrition in their communities. The United Nations Development Programme, in partnership with various other UN organizations, developed a programme which taught primary health care workers the skills needed to address the results of the environmental disaster on young women and girls. The United Nations Population Fund created a programme helping women which family planning which “reduces unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and complications from pregnancy and childbirth”⁶³. The World Health Organization has worked in developing areas raising awareness about the human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical cancer. They led vaccination campaigns in order to protect women from this disease, as well as teaching young women and girls about the importance of the vaccine.⁶⁴

Women living with HIV/AIDS were empowered by a UN Women led initiative which gave them home-based care, skills, and training which permitted them to start their own business using a fund provided by the Gender Equality Programme. Sexual assault centres were set up by UN Women in order to address the needs of sexual assault victims. The centers provide medical care, as well as psychological care and legal counselling. The Ebola crisis has also been addressed by UN Women, which has worked hand-in-hand with local organizations by “facilitating mobilization and information efforts targeting women, who have been disproportionately affected by this disease.”⁶⁵ UN Women has also worked in partnership with various other UN bodies such as UNICEF and the WHO, to improve the reproductive health of women and children by raising awareness in developing nations in order to reduce child and maternal mortality rates.⁶⁶ UN Women has also supported the creating of hotlines to report abuse in developing countries, which would provide assistance to women experiencing violence.⁶⁷ They have also set up mobile units support children, women, and elderly individuals who “confront problems such as human trafficking, gender-based violence, child labour, and teenage pregnancy”.⁶⁸ Through its partnership with NGO’s, UN Women has also established gender-based units in hospitals in order to combat the stigma that victims of sexual assault may suffer, and to provide psychological support, while also creating a forum where girls and women can discuss their experiences with each other and mutually support each other.⁶⁹

Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR)

⁶³ “Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20: Women and Health” *UN Women*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ “Woman and Health” *UN Women*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁹ “Woman and Health” *UN Women*, Nov. 6 2016.

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Maternal mortality is one of the leading causes of death of women worldwide, specifically in developing nations where access to adequate maternal health care services is lacking. As previously mentioned, the WHO states that approximately “830 women die [every day] from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth [with] 99% of all maternal death occur in developing countries”.⁷⁰ There have been significant improvements made to elevated maternal mortality rates, which has dropped by about 44% worldwide from 1990 to 2015.⁷¹ Reducing Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) was one of the Millennium Development Goals, and many countries, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa have successfully halved their maternal mortality rate. The SDGs have set forth a goal which encouraged countries to reduce their MMR to 70 deaths per 100 000 births.⁷²

Women die from maternal causes following complications during pregnancy or childbirth, with most of the complications being treatable or preventable. Nearly 75% of maternal deaths occur due to “severe bleeding (mostly bleeding before childbirth), infection (usually after childbirth), high blood pressure during pregnancy (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia), complications from delivery, and unsafe abortion”.⁷³ Other main causes can be related to AIDS or malaria during pregnancy.⁷⁴

The lack maternal of care for that women receive is often due to lacking access to health services and infrastructure. Women in poor or rural areas are least likely to receive adequate health care, with only 51% of women in low-income countries receiving adequate maternal care.⁷⁵ Lack of information and sexual education are causes to the lacking maternal care. Women do not receive adequate reproductive and sexual education. Women in developing regions are not made aware of their reproductive rights. The Global Fund for Women states that:

“When a young woman knows her sexual and reproductive health rights and can decide for herself when to have sex or to become a mother, and when she is safe from sexual violence – then she is empowered to fully realize her other rights: she can complete her education, get a job, or run for political office.”⁷⁶

Furthermore, the WHO has been actively working to improve maternal mortality rate worldwide. In order to achieve their goal to reduce MMR, the WHO has been working towards addressing inequalities in access and quality of health care in terms of reproductive, maternal, and neonatal health services, ensuring universal access to health care including coverage for comprehensive reproductive, maternal and newborn health care services,

⁷⁰ “Maternal Mortality,” *World Health Organization*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² *Ibid*

⁷³ *Ibid*

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ “Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights,” *Global Fund for Women*, Nov. 6 2016.

addressing all possible causes of maternal mortality and morbidities related to maternal and reproductive health, as well as strengthening the health care system in order to prioritize women and girls health ensuring accountability in order to achieve equity and improve quality of care.⁷⁷

Maternal Mortality remains a prominent issue for women's health and a great barrier in achieving gender equality as women are often prevented from fully realizing themselves due to the burden of childbirth and childbearing which is not alleviated by adequate health care.

Case Study: Indonesia

Indonesia has one of the highest maternal mortality rate in south-east Asia, however, the country has recently adopted new measures to prevent these deaths. The main reason for the elevate MMR is the cultural practice of using a *dukun*, a traditional healer, in childbirth who is not equipped to deal with possible complications that may arise.⁷⁸ In 2005, there was an estimated 262 maternal deaths per 100 000 live births, with most of the deaths occurring when a traditional healer is employed.⁷⁹ The use of a *dukun* is not only related to traditional reasons but also due to financial reasons as it is cheaper to use a traditional healer as opposed to medical professionals. The WHO strategy "Making Pregnancy Safer" has made significant impacts in Indonesia through three key strategies: "every delivery should be attended by a skilled birth attendant, every complication should be referred and managed appropriately, and all reproductive-age females should have access to contraceptives and post-abortion care."⁸⁰ This approach has significantly contributed to the reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate in Indonesia. Furthermore, the Indonesian ministry of health began a midwifery program which trained 54 000 midwives from 1989 to 1996.⁸¹ As a result, 76% of deliveries were aided by skilled attendants in 2006 as opposed to only 25% in 1990.⁸²

Unfortunately, Indonesia is still suffering from alarmingly high maternal mortality rates despite the fact that 82% of births occur in the presence of a trained professional as of 2012.⁸³ However, only 55% of births occur in a health facility, while the quality of antenatal care also being inadequate. Furthermore, women suffer from significant urban-rural disparities, as well as significant wealth disparities⁸⁴. Rural and low-income women are less likely to receive or pursue adequate maternal care. UNICEF suggest various opportunities for action, including, but not limited to:

⁷⁷ "Maternal Mortality," *World Health Organization*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁷⁸ "Saving mother's lives in rural Indonesia" *World Health Organization*, Nov. 6 2016.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ "Issue Briefs: Maternal and child death" *UNICEF Indonesia*, October 2012.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

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“[Increasing] Indonesia’s health spending, including the proportion of DAK going to the health care sector;

[The development and enforcement] of standards and guidelines on the quality of services;

[Including] private health care in government health policies and frameworks;

More facilities providing [Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Newborn Care] services need to be established; and the

[Promotion and acceleration] of preventative health programmes.”⁸⁵

Indonesia still has significant work to do in order to reduce the MMR, through government policies which would increase access to medical professionals and medical infrastructure. However, Indonesia has made significant advances through community initiatives which saw local women being given the opportunity to become prominent health care actors in their communities promoting gender equality within rural areas where women were disproportionately affected by higher rates of maternal mortality.

Conclusion

There are still many remaining discrepancies between regions on the topic of women’s health care with urban areas benefitting from more adequate health care as opposed to rural areas. Much of the work pertaining to the advancement of women’s health rights begins in rural areas of developing nations that often lack adequate infrastructure due to the inaccessibility of certain regions.

Gender equality initiatives pertaining to health care made by UN bodies in partnership with local organizations have been beneficial for women’s health worldwide. Most of these programmes include women within their action plans and give them positions within their communities in order to promote gender equality and empower women. It is important to consider the following questions:

- Has UN Women been effective in implementing initiatives promoting gender equality through health care?
- How can the Beijing Platform for Action strategic objectives be addressed pertaining to the Sustainable Development Goals?
- How can international bodies or local governments address the issue of maternal mortality rate?

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

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“A Brief History,” UN Women, Nov. 5 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>

The History of the Commission on the Status of Women is essential in understanding how the committee works as well as grasping the important role the CSW has played in the advancement of women's rights. Most of the framework on the topic of women's rights has been established by the CSW and is an important component of the committee. The History of the CSW provides context for the work the committee has done.

Analen, C. (2007). Saving mothers' lives in rural Indonesia. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 85(10). Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/85/10/07-031007/en/>

It is interesting to note the drastic improvement of women's health in Indonesia in ten years due to various changes in health administration as well as increasing access to healthcare in rural areas. The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), which was once alarmingly elevated, started to drop due to a mix of traditional and modern approaches to health, as well as providing reproduction health education to women. This article is interesting for the case study on Indonesia, as well as the sub topic of MMR.

UNICEF Indonesia. (2012). Issue Briefs: Maternal and child health [Journal], Sept. 27 2016

UNICEF outlines facts and figures concerning maternal mortality rate in Indonesia as well as the initiatives the country has taken in order to remediate the situation. Maternal Mortality not only affects women but also their children who suffer from poor pre-natal and neonatal care. The impact of maternal mortality rate is most important on children and it must be considered in the analysis of this topic.

UN Women. The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20: Women and Health. Retrieved from: <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/health>

UN Women denotes that women's health and gender equality are intrinsically related. In fact, several factors come into play when discussing women's health (or lack thereof), often it is interrelated with other prominent issues such as malnutrition, violence, child marriage, lack of education, HIV/AIDS, FGM, etc. Women are often most likely to be affected by the aforementioned issues (or are the only ones affected as is the case for FGM). Using this information will be useful to set the background guide in facts in order for delegates to understand the scope of the situation.

World Health Organization. (2015). Maternal Mortality. Retrieved from:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/>

Maternal Mortality Rates are often indicators of women's situations in specific countries. A higher mortality rate is often synonymous with a lack of infrastructure, healthcare services, and medical professionals accessible to women. This is where the rural areas versus urban centres issue comes into play. Women in rural areas are more likely to suffer from higher rates of maternal mortality rate, and thus contribute to poorer women's health which prevents women from actively participating in social gatherings, and other communal engagements. Maternal mortality is also one of the most prominent issues of women's health, it was one of the Millennium Development Goals, with some countries still not having achieved their goal.

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