



Empowering Women in Economic Development, Business and Trade

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I. Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected as global flows of capital, labour, migration, technology, skills and knowledge lessen, and in some cases, totally eliminate the physical, geographical boundaries in which we live and operate. This has implications for how we do business, and also the configuration of the labour force. This in turn affects minority groups generally, and women specifically. This is because the transformed nature of economic activity “reinforces gender structures, barriers, and relationships.”¹

Across the world, when compared with men in both developed and less developed countries, “women are found disproportionately in low-paying, part-time, and temporary jobs.”² The consequences are that women are often in subservient roles, or do not earn as much as their male counterparts. Remarkably, even with these challenges, women are increasing their involvement in paid labour, a phenomenon that has birthed the term, “the feminization of the labour force.” Simultaneously however, developing countries have seen growth in “the feminization of poverty and female proletarianization.” This speaks to firstly the unemployment of women, and secondly, their underemployment where they sometimes settle for jobs that are below their level of qualification, often serving lesser qualified men who own the means of production.

The entrance of women into the sphere of paid labour does not mean that they have equal opportunities as men. It is still common for example, to have a company with highly qualified women in secondary positions such as



Sewing machine operators protest for equal pay outside the Ford plant in London, 1968.

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/518265869595858699/>

vice president, and a sometimes lesser qualified man at the helm. A 2013 report by Catalyst Inc., for example, finds that “even among the world’s most developed countries, women are still extremely underrepresented on the boards of large corporations.”³ Of the 44 countries surveyed, only Finland, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom have over 20 percent of women in board membership. 13 countries have between 10 and 20 percent, 14 nations have between 5 and 10 percent, while 13 countries

¹ George Ritzer. *Globalization: a Basic Text*. (United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2010), 472.

² Ibid

³ Roberto A. Ferdman. “There are only three countries in the world where your boss is more likely

to be a woman.” The Washington Post. January 13, 2015.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/01/13/the-three-countries-where-your-boss-is-more-likely-to-be-a-woman/>



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have less than 5 percent.⁴ This trend of the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making positions at work is visible even in the United States. Here, its figures of women having board seats is less than 20 percent.⁵ Adding to this problem is the fact that some jobs are still labeled as “women’s work” and many men shy

away from these employment opportunities. Usually, these are lesser paying jobs than those that are considered “men’s work.” More women are therefore joining the world force, but the global patterns indicate that we still have some way to go before there is true gender equality in the work place.

2013 Percentage of Board Seats Held by Women

| >20% | 10-20% | 5-10% | <5% |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Finland | Australia | Belgium | Bahrain |
| Norway | Austria | Brazil | Chile |
| Sweden | Canada | China | India |
| United Kingdom | Denmark | Greece | Japan |
| | France | HK China | Kuwait |
| | Germany | Indonesia | Oman |
| | Israel | Ireland | Portugal |
| | Netherlands | Italy | Qatar |
| | Poland | Malaysia | Rep. of Korea |
| | South Africa | Mexico | Russia |
| | Turkey | New Zealand | Saudi Arabia |
| | Switzerland | Singapore | Taiwan |
| | USA | Spain | UAE |
| | | Thailand | |

Source: Catalyst Inc. Knowledge Center, “Quick Take: Women on Boards”, 3 March 2014

⁴ “Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum.” Abridged Version of the Global Report. International Labour Office. Geneva: ILO, 2015. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_334882.pdf

⁵ Roberto A. Ferdman. “There are only three countries in the world where your boss is more likely to be a woman.” The Washington Post. January 13, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/01/13/the-three-countries-where-your-boss-is-more-likely-to-be-a-woman/>



The problems of gender inequality and the disenfranchisement of women in economic development, business and trade require global collaboration for resolution. National governments therefore need to formulate and institute policies that will adequately address the situation. This however, is not enough. There is also a place for the United Nations through its arm that focuses on economic and social development – ECOSOC, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) to play an integral role. With joint forces, the aim would be to alleviate the challenges that women face in these areas in the short term, with a view of completely eradicating them in the long run.

II. History

The rise of women in the market place is changing the traditional gender roles for men and women. Previously, the man was seen as the provider, and so his task was to work outside the home, while the woman did house work and cared for the children. For those who embrace this change, having both man and woman involved in paid labour has helped to increase gender equality and shared financial responsibility in the home. For those that are resistant, there is a constant struggle, especially if the woman earns more than the man. This also has implications for role allocation where there has to be a revisiting of who does what in the home and when. Another drawback to this is the abuse of women which may take place in the home. Writers like Chinkin (1999) observe the fact that culturally and historically, we have constructed women's roles as being a part of the private sphere. By being in the private sphere, they have no recourse to intervention because the government usually cannot abridge the public – private divide. The challenge is therefore that on one hand, governments may be able to police what happens in the workforce, but in the absence of tangible evidence, a lot of

discrimination and exploitation may take place in the domestic environment.

The global migration of women to take advantage of employment opportunities is also problematic. This is because though more and more women are willing to migrate to seek better paying job opportunities, this has led to discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. Many of these women are lured by unscrupulous persons who promise them jobs, insurance, and some place to live. Often this is not the case. These women are sometimes forced into prostitution and drug trafficking because they have no legal recourse or familial support to turn to. For those that do get the jobs that are promised, the working conditions are inhumane. Working hours are longer than normal, there is no insurance and there is less pay. These vacancies are filled however, because ordinary citizens will not do these kinds of work and they also will get the relevant authorities involved.

One wonders then, why would women leave their countries to take on these substandard jobs? Some of these employment opportunities are explored because many of these women do not have a source of income in their home countries. Additionally, what they are being offered is far above what they could possibly get at home. They are therefore willing to take the risk because they feel some form of empowerment in working for their own wages, and also because they get the chance to be in a foreign country where the standard of living is far better than what their country affords.

Female migration affects the traditional view of the family and parenting. The physical presence of a mother forms an important part of a child's emotional, physiological and social development. All of this changes when the mother leaves. This leads to a distant style of parenting where an older sibling, aunt, cousin, family friend or the father is left at home to monitor the child. Through globalization



enabled technologies, communication is maintained through instant messaging and voice and video calls. The family therefore becomes a virtual connection that becomes physical when the absent mother or father comes home. The nuclear family and even the notion of an in residence family to some extent, is rapidly disappearing as more and more women choose to migrate to work. These issues however, are symptoms of the systemic ills of gender

III. Current Situation

The world that we live in is one where gender inequality persists. Men for example, have different access to making and exercising rules when compared with men. Chinkin (1999) for instance, opines that there is a legacy of inequality in international and domestic laws with codified rules that advantage men. While there have been improvements in this area over the last few decades, much more work needs to be done. With the advancement of ideas for example, that everyone is equal, women end up being treated unequally. There are still places where paid maternity leave is unthinkable. Women are expected to produce the same amount of work as men, but no consideration is given to the emotional, physical, psychological and financial strains of child bearing. Additionally, in cases where men are now granted paternity leave, this does more to advance the interests of men than giving needed support to women. The complexity of equality before the law is also felt in areas like the military and the abandonment of ascribed roles for women. Allowing women to participate in all divisions as men do is celebrated generally, but there are implications for the biological challenges that some may face.

As the campaign for gender equality grows stronger and stronger, there is a concurrent wave of backlash in some parts of the world. Some countries for example, view movements for

inequality, largely facilitated by policy choices. There therefore needs to be more collaboration between state and transnational agencies so that basic human rights for all can be protected and enhanced without any discrimination due to race, colour, gender, class, or creed. This needs to happen speedily and consistently if women are to be empowered to harness their own economic development, business and trade.

women's rights as a part of cultural imperialism. Western values are seen as attempts to impose a different way of life upon their societies and this makes it difficult. In some Middle Eastern countries, women are not permitted to work outside the home and need a male chaperon to go outside.

Saudi Arabia remains a case in point as women are not allowed to drive. Strict rules are in place for how women can dress, with little signs of imminent change. An additional challenge is that in some repressive societies, women's movements often become tied up with nationalist movements. This has led to a conflation of national liberation with women liberation as the same struggle and they are often not. Women are therefore used as a socio-economic tool, or not taken seriously enough to have their concerns aired. For those that live in countries where they can advocate for change, this change is still in its embryonic stage and is not evenly dispersed. This makes the local, regional and global efforts for gender equality not only appropriate, but also imperative.



ADEM ALTAN/AFP/Getty Images

Turkish women during a protest on International Women's Day in Ankara, March 8, 2012.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stunning-photos-of-women-protesting-around-the-world_us_56cb837ae4b041136f17f37a

IV. Role of the United Nations

While the problems that affect the empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade are varied and far reaching, the United Nations has limited punitive authority for noncompliance. This is because countries cannot be compelled to implement UN policies, even if they sign on to them. The UN however, can highlight atrocities, inconsistencies and violations of human rights, especially those that are state led. In doing so, it can bring global attention to the wayward countries, thereby using international pressure, especially from the larger, more powerful countries, to elicit compliance. It can also reduce aid to the guilty countries. This may help to catalyze adherence within needier societies. For countries that are

more affluent however, it may be more difficult for the UN to monitor their operations and even penalize them. A country like the United States for example, could, if it feels unjustly pressured, simply withdraw some of its funding to the UN's activities. Moreover, economic development, business and trade are often fluid areas that overlap both the formal and informal economies. These multilayered spheres are therefore far more intricate than the UN through its agencies can adequately measure and collate for worldwide comparisons. In a sense, the UN's mandate for gender parity can be best achieved through education, promotion of its ideals, and offering human, technical, technological, legal and financial expertise. This should be coupled with encouraging country partners to commit to the agreed norms, principles and provisions, and using the global community to simultaneously praise adherents and highlight flagrant violators when the data becomes available.

There are however, some specific things that the United Nations can do to facilitate the empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade. These include:

The United Nations has developed a Gender Inequality Index (GII) that is managed through the United Nations Development Programme. This instrument studies and reports the position of women in 155 countries. "It measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development—reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and



male populations aged 15 years and older.”⁶ Basically, the Gender Inequality Index exposes differences in the distribution of achievements between women and men.⁷ The UN can therefore use the yearly findings of the GII to show countries how they have been doing over the years in these three main areas, how they compare with other nations, and the scope for improvement.

Goal Number 3 of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals seeks to “promote gender equality and empower women.”⁸ As a means of promoting women’s economic development and their involvement in business and trade, the organization can continue to monitor and publicize countries’ progress in the attainment of this Millennium Development Goal. For example, when Goal number 3 is combined with number 2, “to achieve universal primary education,”⁹ the organization has found that:

- “About two thirds of countries in the developing regions have achieved gender parity in primary education.
- In Southern Asia, only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys in 1990. By 2012, the enrolment ratios were the same for girls as for boys.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school.
- Women in Northern Africa hold less than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural

sector. The proportion of women in paid employment outside the agriculture sector has increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 41 per cent in 2015

- In 46 countries, women now hold more than 30 per cent of seats in national parliament in at least one chamber.”¹⁰

These results can therefore be used to work with countries that may need more support in fulfilling the agreed standards, and also as benchmarks for how much progress is being made. Generally, the UN can use these findings to stress this initiative as a global partnership whose effects will improve the collective standard of living both nationally and internationally.

The United Nations in its 71 years of existence, has never had a woman serve as the Secretary General. This is a glaring irony for an organization that has been so vociferous in its calls for gender equality. To help make its appeal to the world more credible, the organization needs to heed the petitions of UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo - Ngcuka to lead by example and elect a woman Secretary General.

The UN can also use its global monitors to encourage national governments to institute the policies that they have signed on to. This includes motivating them to create a business environment that will promote investment, equity, entrepreneurship and transparency. Emphasis should also be placed on the treatment

⁶ “Gender Inequality Index (GII).” United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Reports. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ “We Can End Poverty: Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015.” <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ “Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Sustainable Development Goals. 17 Goals to Transform Our World. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>



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of women relative to men, their promotion where appropriate and provisions for maternity leave.

The work of the International Labour Organization is very important for the humane and standardized treatment of employees. The UN can therefore continue to use this entity to promote labour standards for domestic and outsourced labour, multinational corporations that are hosted in countries and migrant workers. It can also use its coverage and clout to point workers to the recourse that they have in national and international courts if their rights are violated. Additionally most of the ILO's statistics on the plight of women's economic wellbeing highlight the disparities in key leadership and decision-making positions. While work has been done on the other areas where women struggle to maintain a livelihood, more data needs to be gathered on the general employability patterns in formal establishments as well as the sporadic informal economy.



Women's Percentage Share of All Managers, ILO, Latest Years Until 2012

| Rank | Country | Year | % | Rank | Country | Year | % | Rank | Country | Year | % |
|------|-----------------|------|------|------|--------------|------|------|------|----------------|------|------|
| 1 | Jamaica | 2008 | 59.3 | 36 | Canada | 2012 | 36.2 | 69 | Czech Rep. | 2012 | 26.2 |
| 2 | Colombia | 2010 | 53.1 | 37 | Namibia | 2004 | 36.0 | 70 | Italy | 2012 | 25.8 |
| 3 | Saint Lucia | 2004 | 52.3 | 38 | Sweden | 2012 | 35.5 | 71 | Greece | 2012 | 25.1 |
| 4 | Philippines | 2012 | 47.6 | 39 | Bolivia | 2009 | 35.1 | 72 | Guinea | 2010 | 23.9 |
| 5 | Panama | 2012 | 47.4 | 40 | Portugal | 2012 | 34.6 | 73 | Chile | 2012 | 23.6 |
| 6 | Belarus | 2009 | 46.2 | 41 | Azerbaijan | 2012 | 34.2 | 74 | Mauritius | 2012 | 23.4 |
| 7 | Latvia | 2012 | 45.7 | 41 | U.K. | 2012 | 34.2 | 75 | Macedonia | 2012 | 23.1 |
| 8 | Guatemala | 2012 | 44.8 | 42 | Georgia | 2007 | 34.0 | 76 | Viet Nam | 2009 | 23.0 |
| 9 | Bahamas | 2009 | 44.4 | 42 | Rwanda | 2012 | 34.0 | 77 | Albania | 2009 | 22.5 |
| 10 | Moldova | 2012 | 44.1 | 43 | Venezuela | 2012 | 33.4 | 78 | Ethiopia | 2012 | 22.1 |
| 11 | Uruguay | 2011 | 43.9 | 44 | H.K., China | 2012 | 33.2 | 79 | Malaysia | 2012 | 21.5 |
| 12 | Bermuda | 2010 | 43.5 | 44 | Switzerland | 2012 | 33.2 | 80 | Liberia | 2010 | 21.4 |
| 13 | Barbados | 2004 | 43.4 | 45 | Slovakia | 2012 | 33.1 | 81 | Indonesia | 2010 | 21.2 |
| 14 | Trinidad & Tob. | 2010 | 43.1 | 46 | Estonia | 2012 | 32.8 | 82 | Zimbabwe | 2011 | 20.6 |
| 15 | United States | 2008 | 42.7 | 47 | Ireland | 2012 | 32.6 | 83 | Uganda | 2009 | 20.2 |
| 16 | Cayman Is. | 2012 | 42.4 | 48 | Belgium | 2012 | 32.4 | 84 | Cambodia | 2010 | 18.0 |
| 17 | Mongolia | 2012 | 41.9 | 49 | Kyrgyzstan | 2012 | 32.3 | 84 | Luxembourg | 2012 | 18.0 |
| 18 | Belize | 2005 | 41.3 | 49 | Paraguay | 2012 | 32.3 | 85 | China | 2005 | 16.8 |
| 19 | Aruba | 2010 | 41.0 | 50 | Norway | 2012 | 32.2 | 86 | Tanzania | 2006 | 16.5 |
| 19 | Nicaragua | 2006 | 41.0 | 51 | Mexico | 2012 | 32.1 | 87 | Cyprus | 2012 | 15.8 |
| 20 | Seychelles | 2011 | 40.8 | 52 | Israel | 2012 | 31.8 | 88 | Yemen | 2010 | 15.2 |
| 21 | New Zealand | 2008 | 40.0 | 53 | Macau, China | 2012 | 31.4 | 89 | Kosovo | 2012 | 14.8 |
| 22 | Iceland | 2012 | 39.9 | 53 | Romania | 2012 | 31.4 | 89 | Tunisia | 2012 | 14.8 |
| 22 | Ukraine | 2012 | 39.9 | 53 | Singapore | 2008 | 31.4 | 90 | Iran, Is. Rep. | 2010 | 14.6 |
| 23 | Ecuador | 2012 | 39.7 | 54 | South Africa | 2012 | 31.3 | 91 | Palestine | 2012 | 14.4 |
| 24 | France | 2012 | 39.4 | 55 | Germany | 2012 | 31.1 | 92 | Kuwait | 2005 | 13.9 |
| 25 | Russian Fed. | 2012 | 39.1 | 56 | Argentina | 2012 | 31.0 | 93 | Maldives | 2010 | 13.4 |
| 26 | Ghana | 2010 | 39.0 | 57 | Austria | 2012 | 30.0 | 94 | Morocco | 2008 | 12.8 |
| 26 | Slovenia | 2012 | 39.0 | 57 | Spain | 2012 | 30.0 | 95 | Turkey | 2012 | 12.2 |
| 27 | Lithuania | 2012 | 38.8 | 58 | Finland | 2012 | 29.7 | 96 | Japan | 2012 | 11.1 |
| 28 | Botswana | 2010 | 38.6 | 59 | Peru | 2012 | 29.3 | 97 | Korea, Rep. of | 2012 | 11.0 |
| 28 | Domin. Rep. | 2012 | 38.6 | 60 | Serbia | 2012 | 29.1 | 98 | Syria | 2007 | 10.2 |
| 28 | Hungary | 2012 | 38.6 | 61 | Netherlands | 2012 | 29.0 | 99 | U.A.E. | 2008 | 10.0 |
| 29 | Cuba | 2010 | 38.1 | 62 | Vanuatu | 2009 | 28.5 | 100 | Egypt | 2012 | 9.7 |
| 30 | Poland | 2012 | 37.8 | 63 | Denmark | 2012 | 28.4 | 101 | Oman | 2000 | 9.3 |
| 31 | Brazil | 2012 | 37.3 | 63 | Sri Lanka | 2012 | 28.4 | 102 | Lebanon | 2007 | 8.4 |
| 32 | Kazakhstan | 2010 | 37.2 | 64 | Thailand | 2012 | 28.2 | 103 | Saudi Arabia | 2008 | 7.1 |
| 33 | El Salvador | 2012 | 37.1 | 65 | Costa Rica | 2012 | 27.9 | 104 | Qatar | 2007 | 6.8 |
| 34 | Madagascar | 2010 | 36.6 | 66 | Bhutan | 2012 | 27.6 | 105 | Bangladesh | 2011 | 5.4 |
| 35 | Bulgaria | 2012 | 36.4 | 66 | Croatia | 2012 | 27.6 | 106 | Jordan | 2004 | 5.1 |
| 35 | Kiribati | 2010 | 36.4 | 67 | Montenegro | 2012 | 27.3 | 107 | Algeria | 2004 | 4.9 |
| 36 | Australia | 2012 | 36.2 | 68 | Malta | 2012 | 27.0 | 108 | Pakistan | 2008 | 3.0 |

Source: ILO Statistical Database, employment by occupation: managers, June 2014.

Total 126 countries ISCO 88 and ISCO 08 (ranking 1-108 with 14 sets of two countries and two sets of three countries having the same percentage share, marked in blue).

* Data for USA from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Management Occupations from Household Survey Data, 2012, Washington.



V. Landmark UN Resolutions

When one examines the trajectory of the UN's work in the empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade, several resolutions have been passed which have stimulated the world's response to these issues. These include:

Resolution 52 / 195, 18 December 1997 – “Women in Development” – This resolution was passed without a vote. Through it, the UN affirmed the critical role that women and girls play in a country's economic development and invited governments to devise and implement a gender perspective in their workplace policies. Multilateral donors, international financial institutions, and regional development banks were also encouraged to make their offerings accessible in equal proportions to women.¹¹

Resolution 54 / 210, 22 December 1999 – “Women in Development” – This resolution is a reaffirmation of 52/195. It seeks to ensure women's equal rights with men in all areas. As a corollary, member countries are encouraged to institute sound national financial systems, provide women with access to new technologies, all levels of education to improve their employment opportunities and protect their rights to property ownership. Governments are also expected to provide gender sensitive work environments and have safeguards in place for

the most vulnerable. Within this framework, more developed countries are asked to partner with developing nations by providing financial assistance as a buttress against economic shocks.¹²

Resolution 56 / 188, 21 December 2001 – “Women in Development” – This resolution reiterates the points highlighted in 54/210. It also emphasizes the then upcoming International Conference on Financing for Development (March 2002 in Monterrey, Mexico) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa). It also underscores the need to incorporate a gender perspective in their deliberations. Additionally, this resolution calls upon the “United Nations system to integrate a gender mainstreaming into all its programmes and policies.”¹³

Resolution 58 / 206, 23 December 2003 – “Women in Development” – This resolution was passed without a vote and reaffirms all the assurances made in the preceding resolutions. Additionally, it calls for a gender sensitive legal environment to be adopted by governments and for the World Summit on Information Society in phases I and II (Geneva, December 2003 and Tunis, November 2005) to integrate a gender perspective in their planning and evaluation.¹⁴

¹¹ 52/195. *Women in Development*.

<http://www.un.org/ga/documents/gares52/res52195.htm>

¹² “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly. 54/210. *Women in Development*.” United Nations A/RES/54/210.

<http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/54-210.pdf>

¹³ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly. 56/188. *Women in Development*.” United

Nations A/RES/56/188.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/56/188

¹⁴ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 23 December 2003. 58/206. *Women in Development*.” United Nations. A/RES/58/206.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/58/206



Resolution 59 / 248, 22 December 2004 – “World Survey on the Role of Women in Development” - This resolution was adopted without a vote as a part of the UN’s thrust to fully integrate women in development worldwide. Through it, the organization contemplates the Secretary General’s report on how women are affected by international migration and pledges to make this issue a part of the agenda for the 64th session.¹⁵

Resolution 60 / 210, 22 December 2005 – “Women in Development” – This resolution reemphasizes the points delineated in the previous resolutions about women and their role in development. In addition to this, it makes special note of the Secretary General’s report, “*World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration.*” Through it, the plenary session emphasizes the need for, *inter alia*, the “protection of women migrants from violence, discrimination, trafficking, exploitation and abuse.”¹⁶

Resolution 62 / 206, 19 December 2007 – “Women in Development” – This resolution reflects the work that the United Nations has done over the years to highlight and improve all the areas that affect women’s economic development. One of the key points of this resolution is that it reaffirms the need to end the disparities in primary and secondary education as soon as possible, with a view of eliminating

the uneven enrollment patterns at all levels by 2015.¹⁷

Resolution 70 / 219, 22 December 2015 – “Women in Development” – This UN document is a comprehensive review of all the policies, summits, recommendations, assurances and mandates that member states have embarked on in a galvanized attempt to elevate the status of women and girls globally. Some of the main points of this resolution include a reaffirmation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among its many intentions, the UN aspires to reach universal and transformative targets that will promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.¹⁸ It also highlights the 2015 Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action, and encourages governments to be faithful to the corresponding pledges that they have made.

UN Resolution 70/219 also expresses support for the mandate of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). This arm of the organization is expected to continue to “provide a strong voice for women and girls at all levels.”¹⁹ The document laments the prevalence of violence against women and girls and encourages governments to link policies on economic, social and environmental

¹⁵ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2004. 59/248. *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development.*” United Nations A/RES/59/248.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?sy_mbol=A/RES/59/248

¹⁶ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2005. 60/210. *Women in Development.*” United Nations. A/RES/60/210.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?sy_mbol=A/RES/60/210

¹⁷ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2007. 62/206. *Women in Development.*” United Nations. A/RES/62/206.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?sy_mbol=A/RES/62/206

¹⁸ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2015. 70/219. *Women in Development.*” United Nations. A/RES/70/219.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?sy_mbol=A/RES/70/219

¹⁹ Ibid



development for those who are most vulnerable.²⁰ It also calls for concerted attempts to end hunger and achieve food security, as well as to protect women and girls who are affected by complex humanitarian emergencies, terrorism, health threats, climate change and natural disasters.²¹

2016 Commission on the Status of Women –

This session of the United Nations focused on Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development. This a monumental accomplishment because it “resulted in a historic commitment to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”²² The Commission therefore urged Governments and other stakeholders, to take action in five areas. These include:

- “Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks.
- Fostering enabling environments for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- Strengthening women’s leadership and women’s full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development.
- Strengthening gender-responsive data collection and follow-up and review processes.
- Enhancing national institutional arrangements.”²³

Among its recommendations is the call “for the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and of all goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a comprehensive manner.”²⁴ These, when supported by appropriate economic, financial, social and environmental policies as well as gender responsive data collection and dissemination, should greatly advance the cause of women. These of course, should also be accompanied by robust national institutional mechanisms, the entities of the UN system, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders.²⁵

IV. Country and Bloc Positions

Different countries across the world vary in their approach to gender equality as characterized by the empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade. They also differ in the extent to which they report these issues and the international image that they want to project. The countries that are discussed below have significant economic and geopolitical influence in the international system. Understanding their positions on gender

²⁰ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2015. 70/219. *Women in Development.*” United Nations. A/RES/70/219. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/219

²¹ Ibid

²² “*Women’s Empowerment and the Link to Sustainable Development: 2016 Commission on the*

Status of Women. Agreed Conclusions.”

<http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/60/csw60%20agreed%20conclusions%20conclusions%20en.pdf?v=1&d=20160915T144409>

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid



parity is therefore critical if international consensus is to be achieved.²⁶

China – China is known to be an ultra-patriarchal society. As a result, there is a lot of deference to the father figure, generations of men, and their role as leaders of the home and society. With the one child policy that was in place for many years, many families therefore favoured having a son rather than a daughter. This is because someone was needed to carry on the family name and to take care of the female relatives. There are therefore reports of numerous abortions of baby girls before they come to full term, and the Chinese society has a disproportionate high number of boys more than girls.

The opening of China has seen the rise of the new middle class which can afford government sanctions to have another child. Additionally, more and more Chinese families are choosing to educate their children in Western countries like the United States. This, along with media such as television, internet and music is helping to change attitudes towards women. In 2010 for example, China had 137 million female workers. This corresponds to 42.6% of the country's workforce.²⁷ This figure is remarkable because in 1949, Chinese women comprised just 7.5% of the labour force.²⁸ Notably, in 2015, six Chinese women were included in the Forbes 100 Most Powerful Women List.²⁹ These trends speak to a gradual improvement in the gender gap between men and women in China, but there is still much more to be done for a country with a population

of 1.357 billion. Government offices are predominantly led by men, with preference still given to men in most public offices. China then, has made some strides in this area, but is still far from achieving gender equality.

European Union – The European Union is a 28 country bloc that coordinates and cooperates with its members in critical areas such as trade and human rights. In international organizations for example, it participates as a single customs union, with all rules applying to all members and benefits accruing to all. In terms of the empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade, the European Union, like the rest of the world has its struggles. Germany, for example, has an influential role in the Union. Since its Chancellor, Angela Merkel is a woman, it could be easily assumed that the European Union has an even distribution of women and men in important leadership positions. This is not the case. The European Union has six major divisions. These include the European Council, Commission, Parliament, Council of Ministers, Court of Justice, Central Bank and Court of Auditors. All of these are led by men. What steps then has the European Union taken to empower women in their economic development, business and trade?

The European Union says that equality between women and men is one of its founding values.³⁰ This dates back to the 1957 Treaty of Rome where the principle of “equal pay for equal

²⁶ For a detailed report on the Gender Gap within countries and how they compare with global trends, see “*The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*.” World Economic Forum, Switzerland.
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2013.pdf

²⁷ Grace Shao. “*Chinese Women Push Ahead in Gender Equality*.” Asia Times. April 2, 2016.

<http://atimes.com/2016/04/chinese-women-push-ahead-in-gender-equality/>

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ “*Gender Equality*”

<http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/>



work” became law.³¹ The Union reports that in support of gender equality, it has implemented:

1. “Equal treatment legislation
2. Integration of the gender perspective into all other policies and
3. Specific measures for the advancement of women.”³²

In addition to these initiatives, there has been an increase in the number of women in the labour force. These women have also been able to access better education and training.³³ The Union acknowledges however, that gender gaps still remain. In the labour market for example, women make up the majority of lower paid sector workers, and are under-represented in decision-making positions.³⁴ The European Union then, while making deliberate attempts to improve the economic plight of women, still needs to do more work in this area.

Middle East and North Africa – This region of the world serves as a counterbalance to much of the work that is being done to help women develop economically and have a stake in the business and trade affairs of their countries. While there has been some improvement in the standard of living for some women and girls, this region continues to tag behind the rest of the world in creating equal opportunities for women. In some countries for example, female genital mutilation is still prevalent and women have to practice subsistent farming just to survive. Legal

and social restrictions are also in place which obstruct the possibility for women’s economic and political engagement.³⁵ Girls are often not sent to school and women are expected to be in the home.

In regard to the labour force in the Middle East and North Africa region, the World Bank reports that only one in four women are employed or looking for work.³⁶ This is half the global rate.³⁷ The unemployment rates for young women are reported to be about 40 percent, while the last 25 years has seen a doubling of the employment gap between men and women.³⁸ The World Bank’s projection is that if the employment patterns remain, by 2050, 50 million men will be out of work and a significantly higher 145 million women will be unemployed.

Non-Aligned Movement – The Non-Aligned Movement is a 120 –state voting bloc that has a history of supporting the cause of women and girls around the world. For them, this is just one of the prevailing social issues that both policy and action should be used to remedy. It has therefore embraced UN initiatives like Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.³⁹ It is also staunchly opposed to all forms of discrimination and violence against women and fully endorses a

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ “Missing Voices: Gender Equality in the Arab World.” The World Bank Feature Story. March 14, 2013.
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/>

[03/14/missing-voices-gender-equality-in-the-arab-world](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/14/missing-voices-gender-equality-in-the-arab-world)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ “Chapter IV: Social Issues.” XIII Ministerial Conference, Cartagena, Colombia. 8-9 April 2000.
<http://www.nam.gov.za/xiiiminconf/final4.htm#Advancement%20of%20Women>



gender perspective in national, international and multilateral organizations.⁴⁰

Russia – Russia is a country that has been through much economic, ideological and political change. With this evolution of the society, the condition of women and their economic development, business and trade have improved, but only ever so slightly. There is still for instance, the underrepresentation of women in political and bureaucratic institutions.⁴¹ For example, the number of women in parliament has fallen from about 1/3 during the Soviet period to approximately 10% in 1995.⁴² Women are therefore largely locked out of forums where they could make meaningful decisions to change their lot in the country. In terms of the labour force, women made up about half of it under the USSR, but were restricted to jobs that were deemed fit for women.⁴³ With the transition to a market based economy, more and more women have become unemployed and destitute since they no longer have many opportunities to work in areas such as textiles and services.⁴⁴ Men are also still preferred over women for jobs and earn significantly more than they do. Additionally, women are consistently affected by rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Russia has taken several steps to elevate the status of its women. It is a signatory of the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and all the ILO conventions on equal rights for

women and men in employment.⁴⁵ It also allows the formation and operation of the Russian Women's Movement which continues to gain traction in the country. There is still however, a huge disconnect between what the state signs on to and what it actually enforces. Gender equality is therefore an abstract term not yet materialized in Russia.

United States – the United States is one of the strongest promoters of gender equality broadly and the economic advancement of women specifically. In addition to ratifying all the UN treaties and policies, it is one of the key financial supporters and advocates for these gender related initiatives globally. Some of the tangible things that the Obama administration has done to advance the status of women include:

- Creating the White House Council on Women and Girls
- Appointing a White House Advisor on Violence Against Women
- Selecting an Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues
- Appointing two women to the Supreme Court and
- Selecting a team of women to join the Presidential Cabinet and White House staff.⁴⁶

Generally, the United States over the last few years has been able to:

- Help curb violence against women

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ J. Schalkwyk and B. Woroniuk. "Russia: Gender Equality Issues and Resources in Brief." Canadian International Development Agency. Central and Eastern Europe Branch. [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/inet/images.nsf/vLUIImages/Policy/\\$file/CEERUSSIA.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/inet/images.nsf/vLUIImages/Policy/$file/CEERUSSIA.pdf)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ "FACTSHEET: Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment." The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. September 27, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/27/fact-sheet-promoting-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>



- Provide resources to help improve women's health
- Promote women to political and economic leadership
- Reduce sex trafficking and strengthen families and
- Attract and retain women and girls in STEM.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding these accomplishments however, the United States is not a place where women are totally empowered in their economic development, business and trade. Women in academia as well as the public and private sector still have to work twice as hard as men to be duly recognized and compensated. Men still outnumber women in critical management and leadership roles. The United States may therefore be in good stead to achieve the UN's ideals for women, but it is not there yet.

VII. Essential Issues and Questions

The empowerment of women in economic development, business and trade requires a partnership with domestic, local, regional and international actors. The following questions are therefore worth considering as the quest for gender equality continues:

- How can the United Nations through its different arms help to improve the working conditions of migrant women labourers?
- How can national governments protect the interests of women in the informal economy?
- How can national governments better support female entrepreneurs?
- How can banking institutions that provide microcredit make loans more accessible to women?

- How can making banking institutions regulate and secure the timely repayment of loans to underemployed women?
- What can governments and the UN do to reduce the number of girls who are involved in child labour, drug trafficking and transnational sex trafficking?
- What can be done to eliminate gender related abuse and discrimination in the workplace?
- How can the plight of women be improved if mostly men are involved in institutional agenda setting?
- How can countries ensure that more women are involved in the parliamentary process?
- What strategies can be used to protect refugee women and girls from sexual exploitation and domestic in refugee camps?
- How can international organizations, non-governmental organizations and governments work together to provide gainful employment for refugee women?
- How might access to reliable transportation promote women's economic development, business and trade endeavours?

VIII. Possible Proposals

The issues of empowering women in economic development and business are broad, and specific proposals can take many forms. Previous UN resolutions are the best guide to what can be achieved under normal conditions. But they go too far from some Member States,

⁴⁷ Ibid



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and not far enough for others. Member States can push to relax current language, with the goal of reducing the role of the international community in their sovereign national affairs, or they can press for more rigorous action to meet the challenges of fully empowering half the world's population. A few possibilities for further action:

Refugees: With over 60 million people forced to flee their homes around the world, the ECOSOC might consider making the problems of refugee and internally displaced women a priority for the international community, helping them to solve their families problems of endemic poverty through access to full participation in host-country economies, as well as support for training and apprenticeships. Funding would have to be found for such a mandate.

Government employment: Ask Member States (the ECOSOC cannot demand action of the sovereign Member States) to establish minimum

thresholds (quotas) for female participation in government, including parliament, the civil service, diplomatic corps and possibly the armed services.

Business employment: Ask Member States to establish minimum thresholds (quotas) for female participation in private business, including corporate boards, salaried and hourly paid staff. Another possibility would be extending such requirements to contract staff who are not formally company employees, such as Uber drivers.

Specific countries: The ECOSOC can target specific countries for its requests for legal reforms or action. An example would be requesting Saudi Arabia to permit women to drive, allowing them easier participation in the economy. Or the United States might be asked to insure public transportation, ensuring poor women access to employment.



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