



Women & Globalization

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Women and Globalization

Introduction

The current wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly in the developing world. Nevertheless, women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life. For example, the United Nations (UN) estimates that 63 million primary age girls are not enrolled in school. In only nine countries in the world do women hold even one third of seats in the legislature. 500,000 women die in pregnancy or childbirth each year. An African woman, for instance, faces a 1 in 16 chance of dying in childbirth in her lifetime, while in the industrialized world, the chance is 1 in 2800.

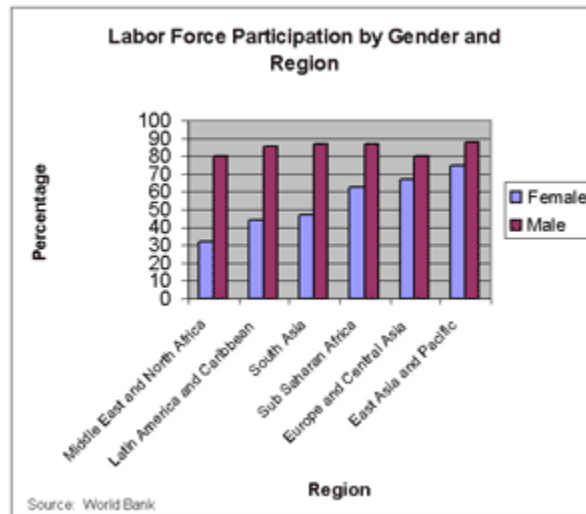
The **UN's Millennium Development Goals** therefore prioritize gender equality and empowerment of women. As part of the Millennium Goals, the international community, especially the UN, will monitor indicators of gender equality such as levels of female enrollment at school, participation in the workplace, and representation in decision-making positions.

Two key international declarations form the basis for this agenda. As part of its "Decade for Women," the UN published the **Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women** in 1985 with the purpose of creating a blueprint for global action to achieve women's equality by the year 2000. Ten years later, the **Fourth World Conference on Women**, held in Beijing in 1995 issued the **Beijing Platform for Action** aimed to update and invigorate the world community's commitment to gender equality. These international conferences and documents have served to crystallize the understanding of the unique problems women face worldwide and to promote efforts to address them. More recently, means to monitor the progress of both have been implemented. Other, similar documents deal with specific challenges to women's rights. For example, the **Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women** guarantees women equal rights with men in all spheres of life, including education, employment, health care, suffrage, nationality, and marriage.

This Issue Brief will examine the effects of globalization on women worldwide, namely on their participation in the economy, democratic participation in the political process, education, health, and sexual slavery. It will also discuss perhaps globalization's greatest benefits to women in the internationalization of the movement for gender equality and the legal structure that supports this goal and recognizes women's rights as basic human rights.

Participation in the Economy

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank encourage developing countries to use export-led growth to expand their economies. Such globalized economies require a labor force of a size that must include women, but women's employment varies greatly by region. For example, 74 percent of women are in the work force in East Asia, the greatest proportion among all regions of the world, and they participate for the longest part of their lives in comparison to other regions. In the Middle East and North Africa, however, only about 34 percent participate. Similarly, South American women participate in the labor force more as they age, indicating that they must contribute more income as their household grows following marriage, while women in the Middle East and North Africa drop out of the labor force in great numbers when they marry and have children.



What accounts for these differences? In many cases, cultural barriers, especially in the relationship between women and men within households, impede increased economic participation, or undermine the quality of that participation. For example, even women who do work face differential treatment such as wage gaps and segregation into traditionally female industries. Women have historically borne the burden of non-monetized labor, such as child care and domestic work.

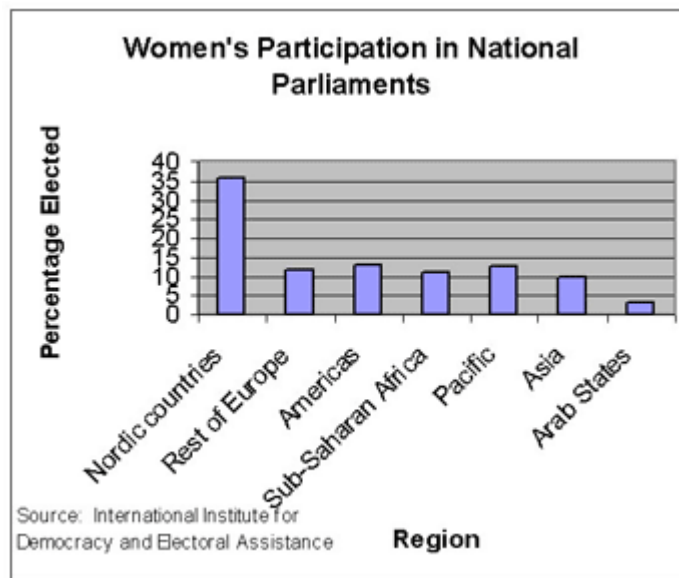
Globalization is changing these norms. The new global developing economies demand women in the monetized as well as non-monetized sectors of work. In fact, globalization has the potential to improve women's economic achievement. For example, increased employment opportunities for women in non-traditional sectors might enable them to earn and control income, giving a source of empowerment and enhancing women's capacity to negotiate their role and status within the household and society. Furthermore, according to the World Bank's report [Enhancing Women's Participation in Economic Development](#), women's economic development will benefit their households and society as a whole: "International experience has proved that support for a stronger role for women in society contributes to economic growth through improved child survival rates, better family health, and reduced fertility rates."

Increased participation in the work force also implies increased hazards for women, however. Women's jobs outside the home tend to be the worst compensated, least secure, and most dangerous available in the economy, especially in this period of recession in most developing countries. For example, gaps in labor laws, or ignorance and lack of enforcement of the labor codes in practice, allow for the exploitation of women. In Guatemala, women constitute 80 percent of the textile factory sector, and thousands of mostly indigenous women provide services as domestic servants. In both sectors, women have only a precarious claim on the rights to Guatemala's minimum wage, work-week length, leave time, health care under the national social security system, and privacy protections. Often, they are subject to physical and/or sexual abuse, according to [Human Rights Watch](#). Unfortunately, even the global nature of business does not confer universal rights for these women. Many U.S.-based companies, such as Target, The Limited, Wal-Mart, GEAR for Sports, Liz Claiborne and Lee Jeans, have contracts with Guatemalan factories and continue to honor them, even if they break explicit company policy, such as physically examining women to determine if they are pregnant and denying health care to employees. According to Human Rights Watch, strengthening legal protection for women laborers and increasing their access to legal recourse, might cement increased participation in the work as a positive development for women.

Still, while globalization may have increased women's vulnerability and dependency, there is hope that prioritizing women's issues has yielded progress and will continue to do so. As the UN has stated, "Women have entered the labor force in unprecedented numbers, increasing the potential for their ability to participate in economic decision making at various levels, starting with the household."

Representation in the Political Process

While the goal of gender equality has been lauded in many international agreements, including the Millennium Development Goals, many governments lack meaningful participation by women. Increased representation of women in governmental institutions and decision-making bodies is crucial for the overall empowerment of women, especially their inclusion in decision-making about issues besides those that are traditionally known as "women's issues," such as child and elder care and reproductive health. The 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women recommended many programs for this purpose, but recent data indicate that the process has been slow and has achieved uneven results worldwide.



The Beijing Conference recommended called upon the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to take strategic action to reduce inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels. Following this conference, in 1996, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) requested that the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DESA) conduct a survey to gather sex-disaggregated data on the composition of national governmental institutions in order to start the research and build the statistical database necessary for informing on the role of women in government. The data was gathered from 187 countries revealed telling information. For instance, the number of female ministers worldwide doubled in the last decade from 3.4 percent in 1987 to 6.8 percent in 1996. While this seems to indicate that women are gaining positions and increasing their stature in government, the overall picture is mixed, and the statistic masks the disparity between countries. For example, Finland and Sweden have a total of 30 percent of women at the ministerial level and several countries such as Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands and Norway have 20-29 percent at that level. But all other countries had less than 20 percent women at the ministerial level. Additionally, this data reveals that women



ministers were predominately concentrated in social areas compared with legal, economic, or political areas. It is important to note as well that these statistics were gathered after the completion of the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, where 189 governments committed themselves to take steps to achieve the goal of achieving democracy through equal representation.

Recently a new report from **the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)** has supported the findings of the 1996 DESA study. UNIFEM's report, *Progress of the World's Women 2002: Volume: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*, is the second of a biennial publication that tracks and measures the global commitment to gender equality. The report points out that many international conferences have agreed to the target of reaching 30 percent representation of women in government, and, while there were definite signs of progress in all regions between 2000 and 2002 towards meeting this goal, that women still only account for 14 percent of all members in parliaments, a statistic that is not much improved from the 1996 numbers. The increases in parliamentary seats that have been gained by women were attributed mainly to political measures such as quotas that were adopted on a voluntary basis. All of the 11 countries that have reached the 30 percent mark this year--Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Mozambique--implemented quotas.

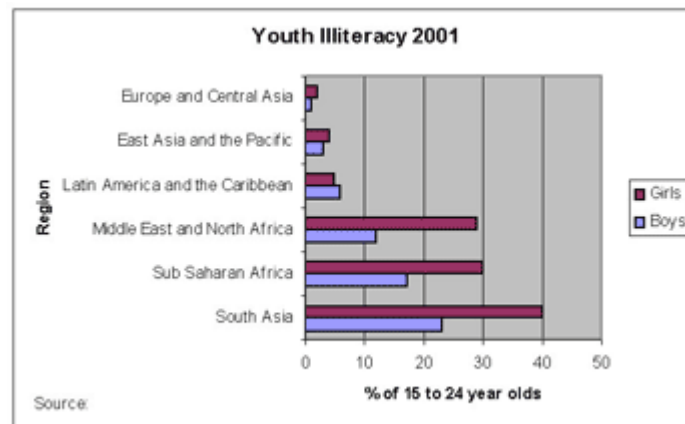
Building on the idea that segments of the population will be best served when they are represented in decision-making bodies, the World Economic Forum in 2002 created the **Women Leaders Initiative** to increase the participation of women in the global economy by increasing their representation by women leaders at global summits. The WEF said it hoped to "foster leadership and integrate women into a global dialogue and reinforce efforts to identify, inspire and encourage women to work together."

However, there are more dimensions to increasing women's representation than simply seats available to them. First, the UN admits that that it is difficult to produce global estimates of the degree to which women's positions in public leadership been increased, and that any quantitative study cannot cover the breadth of women's involvement in decision-making. Secondly, securing parliamentary seats through quotas does not mean that the women who assume these positions are fully prepared for them or are aware that gaining a seat is only the first part of a long process of securing women's equality.

The case women's representation in the new Bulgarian parliament is a good example of this problem. Initially, the representation of women in the Bulgarian parliament was credited to the active campaigning by women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the liberal politics of the new political party, the National Movement for Simeon II (NMSII) (a party that called for the return of the monarchy) that won 43 percent of the seats in the 2001 parliamentary election. The Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF) and the Women's Alliance for Development (WAD) campaigned for more women in parliament through rallies and organized meetings with parliamentarians of all the parties. During the elections in 2001, the NMSII campaign accepted the movement's position and placed women in 40 percent of eligible positions, after the elections in which women secured 26.2 percent of the vote. After the election, however, a BGRF study "found that women in parliament were not fully prepared for their careers. They did not see themselves representing women's interests, nor did they see themselves as having common interests with each other. NGOs will need to continue to work with the new women parliamentarians to being women's issues higher up on their agendas."

Education

Two thirds of the world's children who are not enrolled in school and two thirds of the world's illiterate are female. The UN Millennium Development Goal to promote gender equality and empower women therefore uses education as its target and gender disparity in education as its indicator of progress. Through the efforts of the international community, the UN hopes to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Education is crucial because, according to UNESCO, inequality in education is highly correlated to poverty, and its elimination would help alleviate poverty generally. In addition, UNESCO says that female education has spillover effects for society, including improved fertility rates, household and child health, and educational opportunities for the rest of the household. In addition, increased skill level allows women to participate more in the economy, and increase the economic prosperity of the family.



In order to address the failure to provide basic education for all, which is defined as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the [World Education Forum](#), produced the Education For All targets, including ending inequality between males and females in education. The Forum recommended that governments and organizations implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education that recognizes the need for changes in attitudes, values and practices.

While some improvements have been made in educating girls in the developing world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa where the education systems benefit from oil revenues and women now constitute up to 63 percent of university students, gender gaps in enrollment remain pronounced. In some countries the gap is widening despite the specific recent international focus. It is notable that in the developed world females slightly outnumber males in school, while in the developing world the gap averages eight percentage points. Between 1980 and 1998 the gender gap increased in two regions: Eastern Europe and Sub Saharan Africa. In addition, the lessening gap apparent in other regions, such as South America, may be due to smaller enrollment of boys instead of greater enrollment of girls.

Several of the world's poorest countries, in Sub Saharan Africa, west Asia, and the Arab states, will fail to reach Education For All targets, especially gender parity, by the agreed date of 2005. UNESCO's monitoring team found that norms and values hold females back as much or more than policy. The education of girls is not valued in many societies because they are expected to contribute more at home, while boys should gain skills to work outside the home. There exist



regional specific hazards for girls as well. For example, in South America, the further a school is from a household, the less likely girls are to attend, because travel introduces an increased risk of assault and rape. In parts of the Middle East and North Africa, the public life of a female is so limited that exposure to anything outside the home seems unnecessary. A World Bank study found that incentive-based enrollment programs can overcome even deeply imbedded cultural resistance. For example, when girls in Bangladesh were offered a small salary for attending and passing school, community protests subsided, or parents affected change, on such issues as female students taught by men and constructing separate latrines for males and females.

Health

Everyone in the developing world remains more susceptible to poor health because of lack of services, or lack of access to services, and a lack of education and information about health issues. Women have additional vulnerabilities, especially malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy complications, cervical and breast cancer, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and genital mutilation. In many cultures, women are the first to take care of the vulnerable, sick, and dying and the last to receive preventative or life saving treatment. In order to alleviate these problems, the World Bank's emphasizes public education programs that promote healthy lifestyles, eliminate gender discrimination in education and access to services, and prioritize the help for young girl, "since adolescence is the stage at which the intergenerational cycle of early pregnancy, poor health and nutrition, and poverty can be broken." According to the Bank, investments that improve women's health and nutrition are justified on both economic and humanitarian grounds, because they serve to alleviate poverty and develop human resources.

Maternal health is one of the most important elements in these efforts. The Millennium Development Goals have charged the UN Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) with promoting and monitoring a reduction in maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest problem with maternal mortality, with 1100 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, a figure more than twice as high as in any other region. Reasons for maternal mortality include delays in seeking medical help, transporting pregnant women to health centers, and receiving medical assistance, and may be attributable to social, cultural, religious, and economic factors. For example, a woman may not alter her lifestyle or workload inside and outside the home, because she cannot afford to and because the expectant father does not alter his, burdening her physically and leaving no time for medical attention, which often requires time and travel to obtain.

A sensitive issue for women's global health is the role of reproductive rights. The Platform for Action takes a definitive stance in defense of such rights, including abortion. Empirical evidence shows that, in all world regions, household size contributes directly to poverty and to the workload borne by women. The percentage of poor women decreases with a corresponding decrease in fertility rate. In addition to being a cause of higher welfare for women, lower fertility rates are also shown to be an effect of other positive indicators of development, especially higher education rates and well-functioning markets for labor and credit. Thus, a woman may want to plan or even terminate a pregnancy, requiring access to birth control and abortion, and information about these options. The Platform for Action calls a well-informed decision on family planning the right of every woman. Unsafe abortions are also a threat to women's health. The World Health Organization estimates that 13 percent of maternal deaths are caused by unsafe abortions, and that 20 million of the 40 to 60 million abortions performed each year in the world are unsafe with negative consequences for women's health. Nevertheless, these issues remain controversial, especially in traditional or religious societies, such as Catholic and Muslim countries. At the Beijing Conference, and in the years that followed, the Vatican, Central American countries, and some Muslim countries such as Egypt, opposed the Platform for Action, insisting that information about sexual and reproductive issues should be given to parents to relay to their children, rather than directly to adolescents. They also oppose abortion rights, which the Platform for Action recognizes as a health issue for women.



Another problem is the HIV/AIDS virus, especially in Sub Saharan Africa and South East Asia, which has grown into an epidemic that affects women more adversely than men, because they are less well educated about it and less well protected from it. Women are twice as likely as men to be infected with HIV/AIDS, and in some areas young women are up to six times more likely than men to become infected. UNIFEM has tried to counter the feminization of infection by promoting gender equality: "Gender inequality is fuelling the rapid spread of HIV with women divested of control over their lives and their bodies. Many women and girls are not in a position to say no to unwanted sex, nor can they negotiate condom use." In addition to elevated biological vulnerabilities and cultural restraints on their sexual empowerment, women are at increased risk for contracting HIV for economic reasons: "Financial or material dependence on men means that women cannot control when, with whom and in what circumstances they have sex; many women have to exchange sex for material favors, for daily survival." The WHO has in response declared that women have a right to sexuality that does not endanger their lives and uses this principle to guide their work to prevent HIV/AIDS/STI.

Finally, some traditional cultural practices impose threats to the health of women, and may be more difficult to change through educational and preventative policies than unhealthy practices that are unrelated to culture, such as nutrition. The **UN Human Rights Commission** identifies the practices most threatening to women as: female circumcision, known as female genital mutilation to its opponents, which involves the excision of a woman's external sexual organs, other forms of mutilation, such as facial scarring, various nutritional taboos, and traditional practices associated with childbirth, as well as the problem of dowries in some parts of the world, honor killing, and the consequences of preference for male babies, such as parental neglect and infanticide of female babies. Several UN agencies and other international bodies, especially the World Health Organization, are actively engaged in efforts to eliminate such practices when they affect the health of women and the girl child.

Female genital mutilation is a special focus of many efforts to end violence against women, although the movement to view it as a violation of human rights meets some resistance to what some consider a violation of family and community sanctity. Amnesty International says,

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the cornerstone of the human rights system, asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It protects the right to security of person and the right not to be subjected to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment — rights which are of direct relevance to the practice of female genital mutilation. The traditional interpretation of these rights has generally failed to encompass forms of violence against women such as domestic violence or female genital mutilation. This arises from a common misconception that states are not responsible for human rights abuses committed within the home or the community.

Human rights campaigns have managed to raise awareness worldwide and promote more specific interpretations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that affirm that female genital mutilation, along with other forms of violence against women and harmful traditional practices, is an assault on the dignity, equality, and bodily integrity of women and an affront to human rights.

Modern Day Slavery

The **U.S. State Department** estimated in 2003 that approximately 800,000 – 900,000 people per year are trafficked across international borders worldwide and between 18,000 – 20,000 of those are trafficked into the United States. These numbers include men, women and children who are trafficked into forced labor or sexual exploitation, and appear to be on the rise worldwide. Globalization has provided for an easier means of exploiting those living in poverty who are



seeking better lives, it has also provided for dramatic improvements in transportation and communications with which to facilitate the physical processing of persons.

The State Department report indicates that women are generally lured into slavery through promises of employment as shopkeepers, maids, nannies, or waitresses in developed countries. Upon arriving these women are then told they have been purchased by someone and must work as a prostitute in order to repay the enormous debt they suddenly owe. In order to insure that these women do not flee their owners often subject them to beatings, take their documents upon arrival, and keep them under conditions of slavery. These women then either physically cannot go to the authorities or are fearful of being deported, especially if they do not have their documents or they were fraudulently obtained through their trafficker.

One of the main contributing factors to this increase in trafficking has been the widespread subjugation of women. Often ethnic minorities or lower class groups are more vulnerable to trafficking, because these women and girls have a very low social status that puts them at risk. Another contributor to the increase in trafficking is political and economic crisis in conflict or post-conflict areas. The breakdown of society and the rule of law have made these displaced populations vulnerable to the lure of a better future or an exit out of their current countries.

Trafficking flourishes because it is lucrative, generating \$7-10 billion a year. In addition, the highly clandestine nature of the crime of human trafficking ensures that the great majority of human trafficking cases go unreported and culprits remain at large. There are reports that many human traffickers are associated with international criminal organizations and are, therefore, highly mobile and difficult to prosecute. Further complicating matters, sometimes members of the local law enforcement agencies are involved in trafficking. Prosecution is made difficult because victims of trafficking are afraid to testify against traffickers out of fear for their and their family members' lives.

According to **Family Health International**, 1999, there are programs in Asia that have started to publicly address the causes of trafficking in women in the area. For instance, Thailand focused on the source of demand for trafficked services, such as the clients of underage sex workers. Through the impetus and lobbying of the National Commission on Women's Affairs (NCWA), Thailand is the first country in the region to pass laws that impose greater penalties on customers than on sellers for involvement in commercial sex with underage partners. While the law has not been applied widely, it provides a possible framework or model for further legislation and enforcement in other countries. Several NGO's are also involved in awareness campaigns to draw attention to the causes of trafficking in women; specifically, the NCWA tries to change male sexual norms through a national poster campaign with messages showing a child saying "my father does not visit prostitutes." A Thai NGO called Development and Education Program for Daughters & Communities (DEPDC) aims to prevent women and children from being forced into the illegal sex trade or child labor due to outside pressures, lack of education, and limited employment alternatives. The NGO utilizes a mix of strategies to convince parents about the dangers of the illegal sex trade. Information about HIV and AIDS, brothel conditions, legal penalties, and potential dangers is used to support their arguments.

Perhaps most importantly, the U.S. government has prioritized trafficking as a law-enforcement issue. The United States enacted the **Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000**, which strengthens pre-existing criminal penalties in other related laws, affords new protections to trafficking victims and makes available certain benefits and services to victims of severe forms of trafficking. Under this law, one option that has available to some victims who assist in the prosecution of their traffickers is the "T-Visa" that allows the victim to remain in the United States of America. President Bush took up the issue, calling it a humanitarian crisis, in an address to the United Nations in 2003 "Each year, an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 human beings are bought, sold or forced across the world's borders. Among them are hundreds of thousands of teenage



girls, and others as young as five, who fall victim to the sex trade. This commerce in human life generates billions of dollars each year -- much of which is used to finance organized crime.” Under the United States PROTECT Act, it is now illegal for an American to travel abroad, or for a foreigner to enter the U.S., for the purpose of sex tourism involving children. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act allows the U.S. to use sanctions to discourage trafficking. In addition, NGO- and government-led campaigns such as the **UN’s Global Campaign Against Human Trafficking** warn millions of potential victims about the dangers of trafficking.

Conclusion

Globalization offers women unprecedented opportunities, but equally new and unique challenges. Gender inequality springs from many sources and is often difficult to determine which forms of inequality are being eliminated by the effects of globalization, and which are exacerbated. Work toward eliminating gender inequality in the framework provided by the Beijing Platform for Action has created awareness, monitoring, and alleviation of the externalities that the new global system creates for women. Progress toward eliminating gender inequality in the future depends on finding and embracing the occasions, mostly in the political and legal realm, where the global approach strengthens women’s security and welfare, and fighting the issues, mostly in the economic realm, where women are made worse off by the new global system.