Background Guide

# General Assembly

## Topic I - Women in development

Women play a crucial role in development, as they act as a catalyst for large economic, environmental and social change. These changes then set the stage for greater sustainable development. Women account for 49.6 percent of the world’s population and have great economic potential. They also fulfill major roles in societies around the world. For example, women account for 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries according to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. Thus, they can cause major changes that can directly meet major development goals such as eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The United Nations recognizes this potential, and has been working to give women the tools and support they need to affect real change in society.

The United Nations has been committed to furthering women’s rights since its founding in 1948. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is widely seen as the International Bill of Rights for women. CEDAW establishes a framework for specific action and offers definitions regarding discrimination. Through multiple Conferences on Women, the United Nations affirms its progress toward women’s empowerment. These conferences outline the United Nations’ commitment, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, to combat any remaining gender inequality and promote women’s rights throughout the world.

The UNDP has led to the creation of several initiatives to incorporate women into different roles for economic, social and environmental change. The Gender Equality Seal Programme, for example, aims to curb gender inequality in the workplace through assessment and then implementation of changes. The key areas for the Gender Equality Seal certification include eliminating gender-based pay gaps, increasing women’s roles in decision-making, enhancing work-life balance, enhancing women’s access to non-traditional jobs, eradicating sexual harassment at work and using inclusive, non-sexist communication. More than 400 companies across ten countries have been certified since 2009. This program also certifies regional UNDP offices in their work to support governmental partners in addressing gender equality. Certified entities are in turn supported with other resources UNDP has to offer. This program shows that collaboration with government and private organizations can lead to success in addressing gender equality in development.

The United Nations recognizes the need for sustainable development across the world, particularly when it comes to the connection between gender equality and development. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted to continue the work developed under the Millenium Development Goals. This overarching plan includes seventeen goals, such as eliminating poverty, addressing climate change, gender equality and responsible consumption. They work hand in hand to create progressive actions addressing equality and sustainability. Gender equality is explicitly stated as one of the seventeen goals, and finds itself as an integral part of the remaining sixteen.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one initiative the United Nations created to address various development issues, including women’s role in development. The initiative addresses three core areas: gender equality, crisis response and development impact. Gender equality is a critical component of development. In order for gender equality to play this role, efforts to ensure available and equal opportunities must be part of any plan. The UNDP approach recognizes the unique experiences and needs of women and their ability to contribute to society. Their contributions are crucial in dealing with international issues such as climate change, conflict and disease. The UNDP strongly emphasizes the need for collaborative work to address this issue, including engaging civil organizations, nonprofits, academic institutions, for-profit organizations and international organizations.

In recent years, development strategies have sought to integrate women into more parts of society. By doing so, women can have a greater impact in society, including in areas such as the economy, law and the military. In 2015, United Nations General Assembly passed two resolutions to address women in development. These resolutions build upon past work, and call upon all future efforts to consider how to give women the opportunity to affect change in all parts of society. The United Nations is currently engaged in programs focused on creating sustainable economic development to have women engage in more active roles to promote economic growth and productivity, as mentioned in the 2017 resolution called Women in Development. Examples of programs to address women’s role in economic development are mentioned in several United Nations platforms. Several countries are highlighted in their progress towards including women increasingly serving in military roles, collaborations to end gender-based violence, women’s involvement in politics and differently-abled women joining the labor force. Such examples are a result of the partnerships between the UNDP and all aspects of civil society.

Despite the progress of several initiatives, women still face societal barriers to their involvement in economic development. Women around the world face violence and exploitation everyday while trying to work and support themselves and their families. They also often lack the tools and resources, such as education and funds, needed for their participation in development. The United Nations must continue to work with Member States and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance to women facing violence and provide them with the resources they need. Member States must also recognize the potential that women have to affect change in society and take steps to increase their ability to aid development in their countries. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, highlighted the continued importance of connecting women and development stating “even where progress is made, it may not reach the women and girls who need it most and the ones that are being left furthest behind.” In her 2018 speech to the United Nations, Mlambo-Ngcuka urged Member States to recognize that failure to address this issue can result in missing the other development targets. With this in mind, Member States will need to work together to build upon past successes to strengthen women’s role in development.

### Questions to consider

* Is there a distinct role for women in development? What can Member States do to cultivate their role to increase and impact on development?
* How can Member States work together to embrace a sustainable and equitable development model? Are there different methods that developing or developed countries are using that could be implemented globally?
* What can be learned from initiatives, such as the UNDP’s Gender Equality Seal Programme? Are there successes or challenges from these programs that can be used to make new programs more effective?

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## Topic II - Globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights

Globalization is a process of greater economic integration with social, political, environmental, cultural and legal dimensions, which have an impact on the enjoyment of all human rights. Beginning in the 1400s, advancements like sailing, the internal combustion engine, the Industrial Revolution and the internet have spurred greater globalization. The rise of free trade policies in the 19th and 20th centuries was also a significant contributor to globalization. Early economic globalization culminated in the creation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and ultimately the World Trade Organization, which enshrined principles of free trade and globalization. These international efforts focused on reducing tariffs, stabilizing global trade and ultimately expanding global trade.

During the 20th and the 21st centuries, globalization has had both positive and negative effects. While globalization has been a major contributor to economic development around the world, the interdependence it creates has also allowed for national issues to have broad global implications, like the 2008 recession. The creation of global markets has driven down the price of many products, but it also ensures that local production issues can lead to global price spikes. The negative effects of globalization are often felt keenly in developing economies. These markets may have difficulty competing with the prices of imported goods, and state-subsidized production can make this problem worse. The presence of a global market can also encourage localities to create permissive labor environments in an effort to attract manufacturing and other jobs. This can also cause countries to ignore problems such as sweatshops, low wages and child labor in order to keep foreign investment. Finally, globalization can lead to economic trading and integration that encourages cultural mixing, integration and, in some cases, conflict.

The discussion on globalization and human rights stemmed from growing concern in the 1980s that governments were restricting human rights (particularly economic rights) to create a business-friendly environment that would spur economic development. In 1986, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development, which asserted that Member States have a duty to improve the economic and social capacity of those within their borders but that such developments should not come at the expense of human rights. Globalization created larger challenges for ensuring the protection of human rights while implementing development efforts. In late 1999, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution explicitly on the topic and called for a full report and analysis from the Secretary-General on the relationship between globalization and human rights. The General Assembly made a similar request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2002.

Early General Assembly reports focused on areas: the impact on agricultural trade and economic disparities and the rise of racism and discrimination in light of globalization and massive technological development. Responses to the issue were mixed. Where some Member States argued that this issue required more attention, others believed that proposed actions would stifle economic growth. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had one of the most substantive responses. They concluded that globalization was generally marked by economic growth, but also the spread of liberalism. This cultural shift has the potential to destabilize areas and cause declines in human rights including safe work environment and access to healthcare, clean water and food. The growth itself may necessitate systemic changes that Member States are unprepared for or cannot cope with. This may lead to regional increases in poverty.

The international community has felt many of globalization’s potential for destabilization. In 2008, the international community officially declared an economic recession. The 2008 recession exacerbated many of the disparities caused by globalization. The recession led to major economic setbacks and directly impacted Member States’ ability and willingness to fulfill their human rights obligations, including freedom of movement, education and health goals. As the instability persisted, many countries began to see major shifts in rhetoric away from globalization and toward nationalistic or protectionist policies. These policies tend to be isolationist, leading States to focus their policies and investments on benefits at home, often to the detriment of the international system. They also create problems for traditional and political rights, as restrictions are placed on dissenting views.

In the past four years, the Third Committee has significantly increased both its disapproval of xenophobic actions and its calls for further reevaluation of the state of human rights and the impact of globalization. Its debate has centered around reducing the gap between the rich and how to ensure that Member States can provide stable, accountable social safety nets for all. Because globalization can disrupt parts of the local economy, social safety nets are a vital tool for States to provide stability and predictability for their populations. These recommendations are controversial, however, because many developing Member States lack the monetary resources to provide social safety programs or lack the stability to implement them. The Human Rights Council also has debated the idea of creating an instrument that would track the impact of globalization on human rights and Member States’ mitigation efforts to those negative impacts. This has been a highly controversial suggestion, and Member States have been hesitant to embrace it, largely due to the difficulties in improving some areas of human rights, reluctance to create further mechanisms to which they are held accountable and fear of treating all cases with the same approach.

Looking ahead, the United Nations must meet a few challenges when addressing how globalization has affected human rights. In terms of civil and political rights, globalization has challenged many rights, such as freedom of speech and open elections. As States move to favor nationalistic rhetoric, civil and political rights are stifled to restrict dissenting views. Economic and social rights have also been affected, where social welfare systems and cultural institutions struggle to serve citizens. The international community must find a balance where globalization can continue to foster growth, but the rights of individuals are protected and the resources needed to protect them are in place.

### Questions to consider

* How are the trends caused by globalization affecting civil and political rights? Where are the effects most obvious? How can States and the international community address those impacts?
* What specific impact is globalization having on economic, social and cultural rights? What resources are needed to better protect those rights? How can the United Nations incentivize change? Are enforcement mechanisms necessary and, if so, what should they look like?
* Has modern globalization increased the prevalence of racism? If yes, how can this be addressed?

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