

Gender Equality Handbook For Parliamentarians

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Introduction

Fifteen years ago, Rick Stapenhurst and Luiza Nora researched materials for a Handbook on Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality which was made available to MPs around the globe by the sponsoring organizations, the World Bank Institute and the Canadian Parliamentary Centre.

Over the past 15 years, the world's perspective on gender has changed, and it was felt that the Handbook needed to be revised and updated. With the World Bank Institute being abolished nearly a decade ago, it has fallen on McGill University's School of Continuing Studies – to which Rick Stapenhurst is now affiliated – and the Canadian Parliamentary Centre to undertake the necessary revisions. Research and editing was undertaken by Isabelle Watkinson, research assistant at McGill University, under the guidance of Rick Stapenhurst.

We believe that gender equality is both a democratic right and a necessary precondition for sustainable development as it facilitates the utilization of all available resources to promote development.

The marginalization of some groups on the basis of social roles and gender implies inefficiency.

Unless all people – women and men, regardless of sexual preferences or orientation – have equal opportunities, capacities and voices, gender equality will not be achieved.

As the supreme law-making body, there is an obligation to ensure equal treatment of all citizens. Through its oversight function, parliament has the mandate to demand equal treatment of citizens irrespective of gender. Thus, parliamentary oversight on gender issues is crucial to achieving gender equality. An understanding of the definition of gender, which is a social construct, as opposed to biological differences between men and women, is essential for the adoption of appropriate policies. Achieving gender equality extends beyond getting women into positions of power. However, a significant female presence in decision-making positions combined with a range of enabling factors, including political environment, history of struggle, democratic processes and dynamic links with civil society, bring change to institutional cultures, attitudes, laws and policies.

This handbook is designed to assist parliamentarians in carrying out their oversight role on gender by developing a better understanding of the concept, providing a summary of the budget cycle process, discussing gender budgeting, and examining the gender dimensions of parliamentary committees, as well as suggestions for changing attitudes as a strategy for achieving gender equality.



Overview

Chapter one discusses the definition of gender by making a distinction between biological differences, which determine sex and gender as a social construct, and biological differences are used to justify the assignment of different roles to men and women. The definition is essential for critical analysis of the aspects of gender inequality and for the formulation of laws and policies necessary for the achievement of gender equality.

Chapter two identifies some of the topical gender issues for clarification, including the unequal treatment of some members of society based on social roles as opposed to their biological differences. The issue of poverty, which affects both sexes, will be discussed at length to illustrate how it affects men and women differently. The diverse sources of poverty and their implications for gender-based violence will be analyzed so as to identify appropriate strategies and policies.

Chapter three provides an overview of microfinance, which has been widely accepted as an effective strategy for poverty reduction. Lack of access to resources, such as credit facilities necessary for widespread economic activities, poses a challenge for women.

Chapter four focuses on security issues, singling out conflict as one of the causes of poverty in Africa. Conflict prompts displacement, the collapse of social services, and violation of human rights resulting in a high incidence of HIV/AIDS, which affect the most vulnerable groups - women and children. The chapter also talks about the consequences of gender-based violence.

Chapter five addresses gender equality from the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with emphasis on the contribution parliament's oversight role can make to achieving gender equality.

Chapter six focuses on the budget as a mechanism for allocating resources in society. The chapter begins with a definition of the budget, followed by a discussion on the budget process with the aim of identifying different policy intervention points and ascertaining ways of measuring the impact of policy changes. The chapter concludes with examples of policies that can be implemented in order to achieve gender equality.

Chapter seven establishes the link between gender issues and the role of parliamentarians as representatives of the people. The composition and functioning of committees will be discussed for the purpose of illustrating the gender dimension and how it affects the capacity of men and women to function differently in society

Chapter eight examines the origins of attitudes, discusses reasons for change and how such change can be achieved. The chapter identifies some of the change agents and discusses the statistical measurement of such change.



Chapter one: Definition of gender

1.1 Gender Terminology

Gender

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with identifying as male or female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and between men. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are acquired through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in any given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is a part of the broader sociocultural context.

Gender Identity

Gender identity involves one's internal feelings and intuition regarding the gender they identify with. When one's gender identity corresponds with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth, they are considered cisgender. On the other hand, a *transgender* person does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. A person's gender identity could also denote the fact that they do not identify with any gender, such as *agender* or gender-neutral. The term *nonbinary* serves as an umbrella term for all gender identities that lie outside the binary, as in people that do not firmly and fully identify as either male or female.

Gender Expression

Gender expression refers to how one chooses to express their gender identity through their name, pronouns, clothing, behaviour, voice, physical features, etc. For people who identify as nonbinary, transgender, agender, etc., the expression of this internal selfhood involves using restroom facilities that agree with their gender identity.¹



¹ <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/gender-ID-expression-LGBTQ.aspx>

Gender Equality (Equality between Women and Men)

Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities between women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not imply that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality refers to equal opportunities for all people and equally valued work done by all, irrespective of their sex. Equality between women and men is seen as a precondition for and indicator of sustainable people-centred development.

Gender Equity

Unlike gender equality which demands equal treatment of people, gender equity means the fair treatment of all sexes according to their unique needs. The concept of gender equity acknowledges that *intersectionality* causes groups in society to be disproportionately marginalized. Equity is the process of minimizing the existing unfairness and levelling the playing field. An example is the under-representation of women in politics. Equal representation cannot be instantly achieved without proactive policies, such as quotas, which attempt to minimize the inequality gap.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that varying social identities do not exist in a vacuum and cannot be considered independent of one another. As such, socially defined identities such as race, gender, class, age, sexuality, nationality, religion, etc., intersect to form unique minority groups subject to overlapping forms of discrimination. Intersectional equity acknowledges that historical oppression of minority groups means that Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) are more likely to encounter other forms of systemic oppression.² By acknowledging that structural inequality is greater than the sum of sexism and racism, one can better address and identify the unique experiences of marginalization faced by the most vulnerable minority groups.



² UN Women. 2020.

Gender Blindness

Gender blindness describes the lack of acknowledgment that men and women possess different sociocultural roles, needs and priorities. This phenomenon often results in a lack of consideration and insensitivity towards the unique demands of women, resulting in less female participation and representation in formal settings.

The confusion of gender with sex often leads to an assumption that only men are gender blind, but some women are equally gender blind because of the socialization process (discussed below) which conditions them to accept roles assigned by society as a justifiable basis for unequal treatment. The language used is often an indicator of gender blindness. In the past, people often referred to the person leading discussions as “Chairmen,” irrespective of whether the individual was a man or a woman. The underlying assumption was that only a man could lead discussion, but there is no biological reason why a woman cannot assume that responsibility. The terminology here reflects the conditioning process whereby women are expected to be subordinate to men. Gender blindness has implications for policies, which can continue to widen the gender equality gap unless it is explicitly recognized and addressed.

Gender-Based Discrimination

Gender equality refers to the equal treatment of people, but in most societies, there are groups that are discriminated against on the basis of age, disabilities and sex. Gender-based discrimination in the workplace is illustrated by such practices as the division of labour, which denies some people the opportunity to perform certain tasks they are capable of purely based on the roles assigned by society. Access to and control over resources, which many women are denied, is a good indicator of gender-based discrimination and exacerbates the number of women who are poorer than men.

Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling is a metaphor for the disproportionately large groups of people, such as women, at lower levels in the workforce and their absence at higher levels. This invisible barrier affects minority groups’ social mobility, representation in leadership positions and ability to enact meaningful change. The nursing and teaching professions are often examples of where the glass ceiling occurs. Women are employed in large numbers at the lower levels, but they are often noticeably absent at the decision-making level. This is, in part, a reflection of the family socialization and conditioning process, which defers the decision-making responsibility to the man in the family.

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis entails a process of studying information to ensure that the benefits of policies are equally distributed to all target groups. The study requires an understanding of the meaning of gender and the availability of gender disaggregated statistics.

Gender Mainstreaming

This is a process of ensuring that programs and projects in all institutions reflect the important priority of achieving equal opportunity for all people and acknowledge the existence of gender inequality. It is a deliberate effort to reverse the level of inequality through the allocation of resources and policies in order to provide greater benefits to the disadvantaged groups.

1.2 Socializing Institutions on Gender Difference

Gender can be defined as a social construct created and nurtured by culture, religion, laws and administrative practices. The different sexes are socialized by institutions, such as family, school, church, and in the workplace, to fulfill specific roles, which they accept as given, although they are not. These socializing institutions determine the attitudes society forms about men and women; thus, examining these institutions assists in helping understand the attitudes that determine gender differences.

1.3 Family

Family is the first institution that one is born into and provides a strong foundation for attitudes that individuals will develop. Historically, some roles have been defined as male or female but have changed with time. Household work is often considered the domain of women, and girls are trained and expected to perfect their domestic skills while boys are encouraged to experiment with tools. This socialization process shapes and conditions different approaches to life that boys and girls will adopt. Family governance also includes decisions over intra-household resource allocation, inheritance and endowments. It is here where gender relationships of unequal power can have the most day-to-day impact on women - particularly for poor women and those who are not employed in income-generating activities outside the home.³

The changing family structure, which requires both husband and wife to be engaged in full-time employment, can provide the family with increased financial resources and subsequent improvement in the quality of life. By maintaining the traditional structure, which requires the wife to stay home, the family can fail to benefit from the improved lifestyle that comes with two incomes. However, it may be argued that the working wife structure has a negative impact on the family since the mother will be absent and cannot care for her children personally and take care of the house. The decision will clearly depend on the different family values, but childcare is not necessarily a biological role. Furthermore, the introduction of paternity leave in some high-income countries allows fathers to assume co-responsibility of caring for their newborn babies. Another aspect affecting family structure, which poses a challenge to the maintenance of gender-based privileges, is the increasing number of female-headed households. While in some cases, the decision for a female-headed household is by choice, in other cases, such war-affected countries (e.g. Rwanda or Afghanistan) is a necessity. In Rwanda, an estimated 50 percent⁴ of households are female-headed as a result of the decimation of the male population.

³ Charlie Sever. 2005 The Gender, Poverty, Governance Nexus: Key issues and current debates. Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI).

⁴ Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) database

Religion

Since religion is often the source of cultural beliefs about leadership, authority and values, it can offer a rationale for explaining cultural constraints on the role of women. The changing roles of women, both inside religious communities and in broader public spheres, offer hope that these traditional constraints can be overcome. According to some cultures, women should be subservient to their husbands. Decision-making at home or in religious organizations is often reserved for men based on this tenet. In addition, the religious requirement for men to protect their families, including their wives, often excludes women from the right to own or control the use of family property. In some respect, protection of the family by the head of the household is in the interest of the protected; however, it denies women an opportunity to acquire decision-making experience, which, in turn, acts as a further hurdle to women taking up decision-making positions within the family or in society more broadly.

Division of Labour

Gender roles cultivated by the socialization process have pervaded the division of labour in and outside of the home for centuries. This section will refer to Western Europe, particularly Britain, as its labour force dynamics denote a capitalistic trend that has been exemplified in numerous other developed nations later in history. In 19th century Britain, the husband's wage was rarely enough to support a low- to middle-class family on its own.⁵ Despite this trend, given patriarchal and religious ideals, the female workforce participation rate remained low, resulting in children often beginning work at a young age.⁶ However, towards the end of the industrial revolution, the notion of human capital and skilled versus unskilled work emerged.⁷ Middle-class workers gained more bargaining power in wage contracts which popularized the *family or working wage*.⁸ Seccombe asserts that this change was driven largely by a conservative labour movement, exemplified by a quote from Henry Broadhurst, the leader of the *Trades Union Congress* in 1875:⁹

“[The goal of the labour movement must be to] bring about a condition... where wives and daughters would be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood with the great and strong men of the world.”

Thus, it was not until the mid-19th century when the *male breadwinner, female homemaker model* became an integral part of the working-class culture.¹⁰ Under this model, women assumed the responsibilities for caretaking the young and the old, while the family's economic wellbeing is delegated to the husband.¹¹ This burden of domestic responsibilities inhibited female entry into the workforce, leaving the bulk of corporate and political decision-making to men who are perceived as reliable and disciplined labourers.

⁵ Seccombe, W. (1986)

⁶ Seccombe, W. (1986)

⁷ Seccombe, W. (1986).

⁸ Seccombe, W. (1986)

⁹ Seccombe, W. (1986). p. 55.

¹⁰ Creighton, C. 1999.

¹¹ Creighton, C. 1999.



It should be noted that the embodiment of the male breadwinner family (MBWF) differs across societies based on the nature of economic development, the labour market, industry composition, political system, social policies, etc.¹² Oftentimes, either a lack or loss of female employment opportunities meant that the MBWF was a given structure in the community. In other economies, married women abstained from working because their husbands had wrestled for high enough income to rely on a family wage (FW).¹³ Moreover, historically, conditions of war established an inevitable division of labour. It is argued that World War II marked the period in which the societal beliefs regarding a man and woman's role in society became more dogmatically established in a gendered family dichotomy.¹⁴ These normative expectations became entrenched in the social fabric of many Western nations during the postwar decades (e.g. the United Kingdom, the Netherlands), giving rise to social policies that reinforced this gendered division of labour.¹⁵



In "The Rise and Decline of the 'Male Breadwinner Family' in Britain", Creighton identifies five ways in which the government can encourage the adoption of the model and acceptance of the FW: manipulation of labour market operations by rooting the FW in collective bargaining procedures, legislating for minimum wage in particular industries, bars on employment of married women, etc.; welfare policies that assist MBWFs (e.g. benefits for working men); taxation policies that encourage married women to remain outside of the labour market; the provision of subsidies (e.g. subsidized housing for single-income families); and direct payments to families with children to incentivize women to stay home. In the case of Britain, all five approaches were implemented following WWII as the nation's social policies regarding unemployment, disability, retirement, and illness were skewed to serve the MBWF. Moreover, many European countries (i.e. U.K., Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands) used marital law to encourage citizens to uphold this familial structure by introducing fault-based divorce.¹⁷

Following social movements during the late 20th century, there was a shift away from the normative family structure as more women entered the workforce.¹⁸ While the division of paid labour changed as families became codependent on more than one source of income, the division of unpaid labour remained virtually stagnant.¹⁹

¹² Cunningham, M. 2008.

¹³ Cunningham, M. 2008.

¹⁴ Cunningham, M. 2008.

¹⁵ Lewis, J. p. 154.

¹⁶ Lewis, J. 2001

¹⁷ Creighton, C. 1999.

¹⁸ Creighton, C. 1999.

¹⁹ Seccombe, W. (1986).



This is because sociocultural conceptions have acted as a glass ceiling to long-term employment; the perception of the man being the head of the household can affect hiring policies and decisions in the workplace. When competing for employment, a man may have a greater chance of being offered a full-time position than a woman, especially if she is of childbearing age. This is because women are often discriminated against not because of their competence, but due to the perception of possible family-related disruption to the employment, such as maternity leave. Consequently, many women may be employed as part-time workers and in lower-paid positions. Thus, while the popularity of the MBWF has declined, variations including the one-and-a-half earner model, in which the man is a full-time earner, and the woman is a part-time earner fulfilling most of the caretaking, remains prevalent today.²⁰

While less demanding responsibilities in the workplace could be viewed as a positive form of engagement because it frees up time to attend to the family's needs, the concomitant remuneration may account for much of the income differential between men and women. According to parliamentary staff in Ghana²¹, gender-based discrimination was one of the reasons for a large proportion of Ghanaian women opting for self-employment. However, self-employment may also imply long working hours without health and pension benefits.

Poverty can be traced to certain types and patterns of work and to the exclusion of certain groups from opportunities to partake in decent work. Gender is one major determinant of rights, access and patterns of productive work. Hence, gender shapes how individuals and households experience and break out of poverty. Unfortunately, the MBWF model created a social division that meant women became dependent on a male counterpart's income and legitimacy in society. As a result, many families fell into poverty if the husband's income was insufficient to support their needs. Moreover, under this system, women are financially and fiscally dependent on men, leading to a power imbalance that can obstruct the wife's departure from a dysfunctional marriage due to a lack of financial mobility. Ultimately, the popularization of the MBWF model has sustained gender disparities in political and economic life, imposing a glass ceiling that has limited the social mobility of women.

In some countries, the horticulture industry provides examples of gender-based division of labour. For example, women are employed to plant, weed and pick flowers, while men typically drive tractors, weigh and pack flowers. Restricting women to less skilled tasks denies them access to the social mobility available to their male counterparts, thereby reinforcing their position in society and inhibiting their ability to move out of poverty. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from decision-making at higher levels perpetuates these gender-based differences in the workplace. Pressure from international and domestic groups seeking more equality resulted in women in the horticulture industry in Kenya undertaking work traditionally reserved for men, such as weighing and packing flowers and being recruited for management positions. This is illustrative of the fact that gender roles are made by society and thus can be changed by society.



²⁰ Creighton, C. 1999. p. 157.

²¹ Parliamentary staff training in Ghana a joint activity of the World Bank Institute and the Parliamentary Centre in Ottawa. November-December 2004.

Due to unequal access to decision-making positions, women are often employed in capacities that limit their employment benefits. As representatives of all people, parliamentarians have a responsibility to recognize the contribution of women to the economy and encourage and facilitate the passage of legislation that ensures the private sector, as well as the public sector, provide at least low-level benefits for women working part-time. In order to promote the dual-earner familial model, it has been advised to advocate for policies that: encourage and support equal sharing of care work; promote transitions between paid and unpaid work; grant life chance guarantees for those that enter low-income flexible jobs to be able to leave or those who stay can be compensated.²²

1.4 Conclusion

Understanding the sources of unequal treatment of people in society and the need for gender equality are essential preconditions to tackling the ongoing inequity experienced by women. Biological differences are static, but social roles are dynamic and change with time. For instance, most cultures are changing due to globalization, but biological differences remain the same. These changing dimensions of gender are important for policy formulation because what society has made, society can change; what hampers change, though, in many instances, is the fear of loss of benefits by those presently in privileged positions.

Case Study:

The Ramifications of Family Norms and the Division of Labour on Japanese Population Demographics

On a macroscale, sociocultural gender roles regarding familial and domestic responsibilities play a notable role in shaping the national demographics in the long-term. This is because the societal customs regarding marriage, childbirth, etc., influence the population's fertility rate, which is a strong determinant of demographic structure in a society.

In 2019, Japan's recorded the lowest number of births since the country began keeping track of its fertility rate in 1899.²³ Since the nation also has the highest life expectancy globally (84), over 20 percent of its citizens are over the age of 65.²⁴ Therefore, with a low birth rate, high life expectancy and minimal immigration, the Japanese population is shrinking.²⁵

Among other things, there are two primary contributors to the low fertility rate in Japan: the growing size of the unmarried young population and the declining birthrate among couples who are married.²⁶ The choice to delay or avoid marriage has in part been driven by higher female representation in the workforce (68 percent)²⁷ and a rise in non-traditional values; a study on Japanese citizens aged 20-49 found that from 1994 to 2000, the number of participants who agree that a woman can lead a full life without marriage increased by 12 percent.²⁸

²² Creighton, C. 1999. p. 161.

²³ Jozuka, E., Yeung, J. & Kwon, J. 2019

²⁴ The Economist. 2018.

²⁵ Jozuka, E., Yeung, J. & Kwon, J. 2019.

²⁶ Shirahase, Sawako. 2015.

²⁷ The Economist. 2017.

²⁸ Kim, C., Bumpass, L., Tsuya, N., and. Rindfuss, R. 2014.

However, the underlying reason for this trend points to the fact that traditional values of gender roles and the gendered division of labour have remained firmly entrenched in Japanese culture.

Japan's post-war economy depended upon the male breadwinner, female caretaker model; women served as housewives fulfilling domestic responsibilities to allow the men to work in ensuring the family is economically sound.²⁹ This family structure fostered the nation's infamous work culture of long, strenuous hours, as well as social security policies and hiring practices that pose a glass ceiling.³⁰ Thus, as more women have entered the workforce over time, the normative expectations of a wife's role in society have largely persisted as the ageing population has further burdened the caretaking responsibilities fulfilled primarily by married women. Therefore, in a society where caretaking for the elderly population is not only particularly needed but culturally customary, achieving equality in access to opportunities and representation in the workforce is a challenge.

Today, women remain disproportionately represented in the unpaid work sector, where the labour market is volatile, and there is a greater risk of poverty. In marriages where both partners are employed, a Japanese husband spends just 46 minutes a day on domestic tasks, compared to almost five hours for the wife.³¹ Moreover, in 2017, Japanese women earned just 74 percent of their male counterparts' average wage, a disparity that is almost 10 percent greater than that of the United States.³² This is despite the fact that the accessibility to education for women has dramatically improved; 64 percent of women aged 25-34 have attained post-secondary degrees, compared to 59 percent of men.³³ With the gender disparities in access to education largely eliminated, the overall lack of progressive change in Japan lends support to the argument that comprehensive progress in social attitudes is needed.

The Japanese government has acknowledged that gender equality is imperative to addressing its demographic crisis and mending the economy. However, the extent of progress left to be done is considerable; in 2021, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Equality Report ranked Japan as 120th out of 156 countries (a fall of 40 places since 2006).³⁴ In 2015, the government set a target of 30 percent female representation in leadership positions to be accomplished by 2020³⁵ – an ambitious goal since, in 2017, a mere 10 percent of cabinet ministers were women and no company on the national stock market was headed by a woman.³⁶ Given that this figure was only 7.8 percent in 2019, the Japanese government has revised the timeline to 2030. The slow rate of change points to the need for more drastic measures such as revised work hours, subsidized childcare, strict gender quotas and more. Without these progressive efforts, it is questionable whether the Prime Minister's goal of halting the population decline (100 million before 2060) will be achieved.³⁷

²⁹ Shirahase, S. 2015.

³⁰ Shirahase, S. 2015.

³¹ The Economist. 2017.

³² The Economist. 2017.

³³ OECD. 2020.

³⁴ Oi, M. 2018

³⁵ Oi, M. 2018.

³⁶ The Economist. 2017.

³⁷ Jozuka, E., Yeung, J. & Kwon, J. 2019



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Chapter two: Gender equality issues

2.1 Access to Resources

Inequality in the access to and control of financial resources lies at the centre of the issue of global poverty.³⁸ Women often have limited access to resources, not necessarily because of their biological composition, but based on social roles and barriers in society. While many women experience unequal access to resources, the magnitude of the problem varies with the level of development. In some African and Middle Eastern countries, discriminatory legal frameworks such as inheritance laws that fail to grant equal rights to women. The patriarchal nature of some societies means that in the event of a husband's death, the family's property, including land, is automatically inherited by the deceased's male relatives or by his eldest son. The widow in such a situation is divorced from ownership of the family's property and the decision-making is considered the preserve of men. Many women work on the land, which is their main source of economic activity; their exclusion from land ownership and inability to contribute to decision-making about the use of the land is a factor in the continuing high rates of poverty amongst women. Moreover, a loss of home or property rights due to discriminatory inheritance laws can expose widows to sexual violence, stigma, social isolation and exclusion from the use of communal assets.³⁹ Globally, women are poorer than men not only because they are often denied equal rights, do not have access to education and opportunities and, generally, do not have the same entitlements as men, but because they also carry the burden of reproductive and care work, which is the majority of unpaid labor.

2.2 Education

Education is a prerequisite for better employment opportunities but, in most developing countries, access to education and the literacy rate is higher among men than women. Today, over two-thirds of countries have reached gender parity in primary education enrolment, defined by a gender parity index (GPI) value between 0.97 and 1.03.⁴⁰ Despite this progress, women still account for 56 percent of the global youth illiterate population.⁴¹

³⁸ UN Women. 2018.

³⁹ UN Women. 2018.

⁴⁰ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁴¹ UNICEF Data. 2020.



The 2021 Global Gender Gap Report

The World Economic Forum presents the Global Gender Gap Index, which measures gender-based gaps among four key dimensions:⁴²

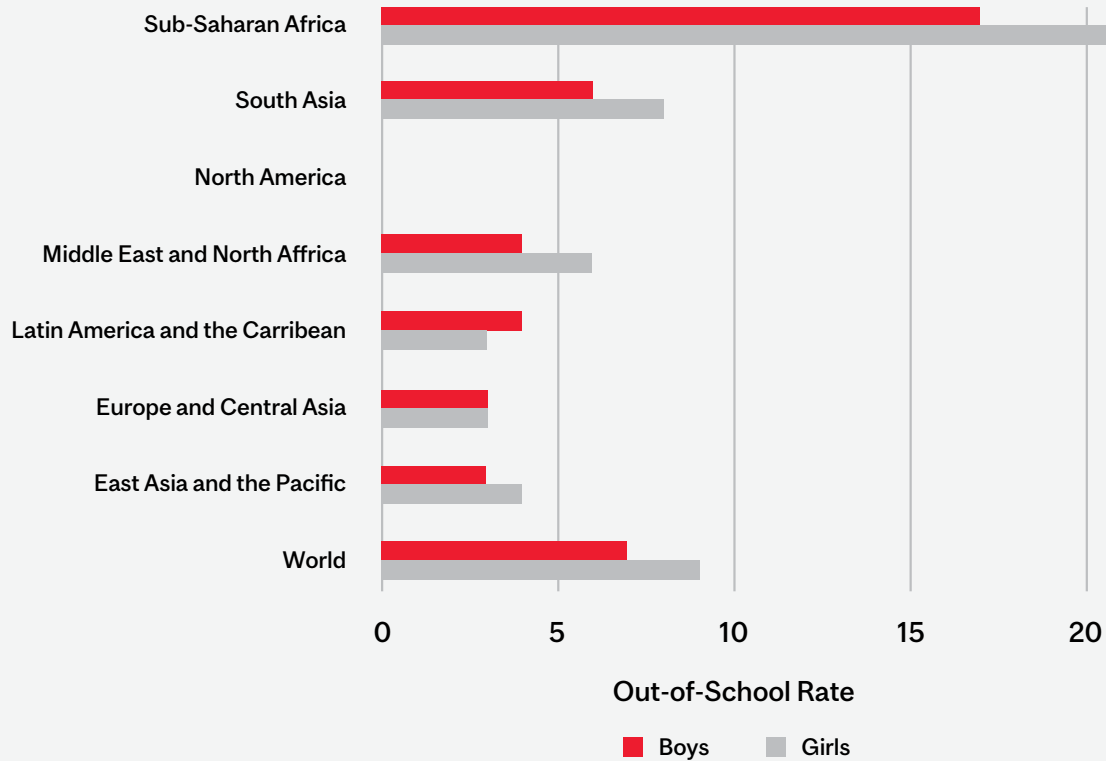
Component	Overall Index	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
Western Europe	77.4%	70.0%	99.8%	96.7%	43.8%
North America	76.4%	75.3%	100.0%	96.9%	33.4%
Latin-America and the Caribbean	72.1%	64.2%	99.7%	97.6%	27.1%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	71.2%	73.5%	99.7%	97.7%	14.2%
East Asia and the Pacific	68.9%	69.6%	97.6%	94.9%	13.5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	67.2%	66.1%	84.5%	97.3%	20.8%
South Asia	62.3%	33.8%	99.3%	94.2%	28.1%
Middle East and North Africa	60.9%	58.3%	94.2%	96.5%	12.1%
Global Average	67.7%	58.3%	95.0%	97.5%	21.8%

The regions with the most considerable gender disparities in access to education and youth literacy rates include Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and South Asia; they have a gender parity index (GPI) at 0.93, 0.96, 0.96, respectively.⁴³

⁴² World Economic Forum. 2021.

⁴³ UNICEF Data. 2020.

Out-of-School Rate Among Children of Primary School Age, by Sex, 2018 ⁴⁴



Across both genders, the barriers to attending primary school for children tend to be poverty, geographic remoteness, armed conflict, lack of school infrastructure and poor-quality education.⁴⁵ When these barriers are present in some societies, the socialization process often conditions people to accept that a male child is the natural heir in the family; therefore, the educational needs of a boy child take precedence over that of a girl child when family resources are limited. These risk factors coupled with gender inequality intersect to disproportionately inhibit marginalized girls from receiving an education. Consequently, out-of-school girls are more likely to never enroll in school than out-of-school boys.⁴⁶ Additionally, mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities. A mother with few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries, each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one third to one-half year. Education also has flow-on implications for access to decision-making positions.

Girls' education and the promotion of gender equality in education are critical to development and policies and actions that do not address gender disparities miss critical development opportunities. Out of-school girls are more at risk for early and forced marriage as well as attendant health risks such as adolescent childbearing.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁴⁵ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁴⁶ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁴⁷ UNICEF Data. 2020.



The benefits of increased completion of secondary education for girls include increased lifetime earnings to lower adolescent childbearing, child marriage, stunting and maternal and child mortality.⁴⁸ Thus, reforms such as the abolition of school fees, cash transfer programs and school feeding programs have been shown to successfully improve access to education. Additional measures can be added to specifically target out-of-school and marginalized girls such as village-based schools, 'girl-friendly' schools with gendered latrines, gender-sensitive teaching approaches and flexible education opportunities for girls who have left schools (e.g. youth mothers).⁴⁹

Example: Plan to Increase Girl's School Enrolment in Pakistan

The World Bank Report "Country Gender Assessment (CGA)"⁵⁰ on Pakistan found that concern about family honor was a major factor preventing many parents from sending their girls to school – particularly in rural areas where villages did not have local school facilities and the girls had to travel outside of their communities. The report found that concerns about security and reputation was restricting women's movement outside the home, thus limiting their access, not only to education, but also to medical care, opportunities for paid work, voting, and other forms of community and political participation.

Educating girls provides the shortest route to bridging the gender gap and realizing the development dividends in Pakistan. The net primary enrolment rate for girls is still only about 42 to 45 percent. As girls transition to middle school, the drop-out rate increases; thus, very few girls complete middle school and even fewer go onto secondary or high school. The report said it was a myth to suggest parents were unwilling to send their girls to school. All parents valued education, but they were concerned about allowing a girl to walk outside her community alone. This fear stems, not necessarily from concern that they might be kidnapped, but is related to cultural practices. Identifying the reason for the reticence to allow girls to attend school opened possibilities for overcoming the problem by constructing more schools in local communities.

However, the report pointed out, there was a clear financial constraint to building more new schools and there were simply too few educated women in many Pakistani villages to staff schools for girls. Thus, the report suggests offering stipends for those who have to travel a distance to go to school as a means of encouraging girls into the classroom. Parents were very supportive of this idea. The program could offer a stipend, which is pegged to the distance the school is away from where a girl lives with her family or actually propose some kind of safe method of transportation be supplied by the local governments.

⁴⁸ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁴⁹ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁵⁰ Vishwanath, T. 2006.



2.3 Gender and Decision-Making

Research has shown that women's participation and representation in decision-making can lower levels of female poverty.⁵¹ However, the effects of intersectionality mean that while women are not always poorer than men, they are generally more vulnerable to poverty due to gender inequality. Thus, in addition to basic inequalities in women accessing education and resources, as well as shouldering an unequal burden when it comes to poverty, women continue to be under-represented in formal decision-making structures. Although, women are increasingly active in community support systems, gender disparities persist in public administration at all levels: local, regional and national

Parliament represents the highest law-making institution, but women who constitute the majority of the population are often marginalized from that decision-making process. Women's representation in parliaments worldwide is usually much lower compared with men. Within parliament, women often occupy less powerful positions, which is a reflection of an unequal access to education (in developing countries) and social roles assigned to women in general. The socialization process tends to steer women along the study of subjects related to their expected roles and hence their involvement in parliamentary committees or appointment to ministries often reflects those roles. However, there has been some good news and notable changes in women adopting higher level decision-making positions. Recently, the U.S. elected its first female, Black and South Asian Vice President of the U.S. and highest-ranking female official in American history.

Women's share of seats in parliament has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, women still hold only 25.6 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide (only Rwanda, Cuba and the United Arab Emirates have achieved parity).⁵² As of 1 January 2021, 51 countries had met the target of at least 30 percent representation by women in parliament, which was set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990. By the end of 2020, 81 countries had adopted some form of affirmative action, such as party quotas or reserving seats for women in parliament to ensure their political participation.

Some of the obstacles to women's participation in politics are rooted in culture, religion and administrative practices. Instead of being flexible with regards to the scheduling of parliamentary business, gender blindness can lead administrators to insist on traditional business hours, which discriminate against women with young children who cannot stay late. Gender equity implies the recognition of the important function that is performed by those assigned certain social roles and the flexibility to accommodate them in the decision making or development process.



⁵¹ Baden, S. 2000

⁵² IPU. 2021.

Women in Parliament, Situation as of 1 January 2021⁵³

World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliament

	Single house or lower house	Upper house or Senate	Both houses combined
World average	25.6%	24.8%	25.5%
Regional averages			
Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in unicameral parliaments or in the lower house of parliament.			
Nordic countries	44.5%	-	-
Americas	32.2%	33.0%	32.4%
Europe (Nordic countries included)	30.5%	30.2%	30.4%
Europe (Nordic countries not included)	29.1%	30.2%	29.3%
Sub-Saharan Africa	25.1%	23.9%	25.0%
Asia	20.8%	17.6%	20.4%
Middle East and North Africa	19.3%	11.2%	17.8%

According to the qualitative study⁵⁴ of women in decision making in Southern Africa, women make a marked difference to governance where they are represented in politics in significant numbers and work in enabling environments. The key findings of the study showed that significant presence of women in politics combined with a range of enabling factors including background and history of struggle, democracy, and dynamic links with civil society had impact on institutional culture, attitudes, laws, policies, and service delivery. Moreover, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, women's representation in politics has been shown to strengthen equality and bipartisanship.⁵⁵ Specifically, female policymakers are more likely to advocate for policies that often concern women's interests, such as education, gender equality and violence against women, including domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment.⁵⁶

⁵³ IPU. 2021.

⁵⁴ Colleen Lowe Morna ed. 2004.

⁵⁵ Vogelstein, R. B and Bro, A. 2021.

⁵⁶ Asiedu, A., Branstette, C., Gaekwad-Babulal, N., Malokele, N. 2008.



2.4 Legal Environment and Access to Justice

Poor and marginalized groups including women may also encounter problems and discrimination within legal systems. The obstacles faced by woman in the legal environment occur at three levels:

- (i) Laws - discriminatory laws pertaining to property ownership or the absence of anti-violence legislation
- (ii) Legal systems - information requirements or evidence procedures that make access to justice inaccessible; and
- (iii) Cultural attitudes - male bias exhibited by judges, lawyers and court officials

Legislative reform along with reforms to the legal system can help ensure the protection of women's rights and equal access to justice. However, additional obstacles remain despite significant progress, thereby limiting the ability of many women to realize equality. For instance, poor women lack information, education and access to legal processes, resulting in a gap between having equal right conferred on them by legislation and the ability to enforce and enjoy those rights.

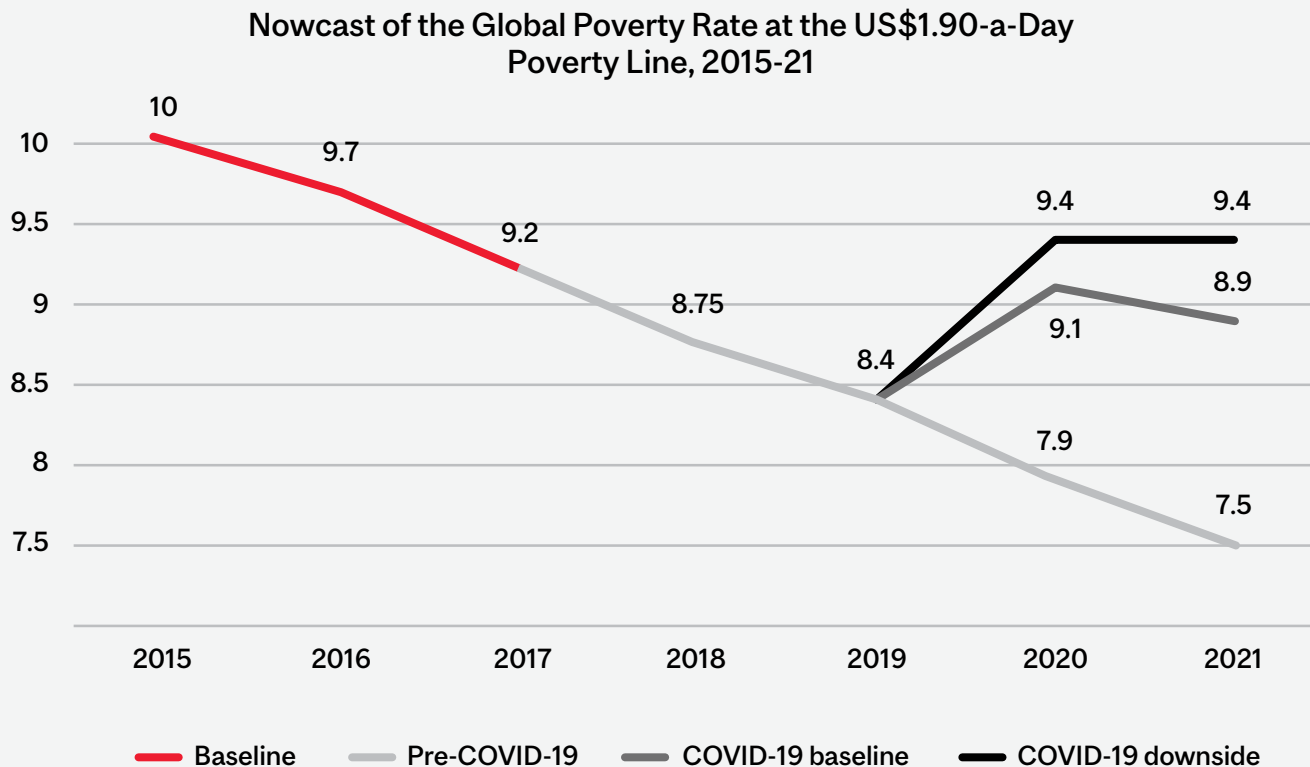
Also in some countries, legislative reform and making the legal system more accessible for women may result in women participating in "parallel" legal systems, whereby these new sets of legal rights and legal system coexist alongside pre-existing informal or customary laws and legal systems. The use of customary law is more common in some places and is able to be accessed locally, therefore, it is more likely to be used and applied by marginalized groups, such as women, than formal law. Customary law is particularly significant for women's access to justice as it tends to govern family or domestic issues such as marriage, divorce, adultery and gender-based violence. Research indicates that when cases are tried through customary law there may be even less chance of women receiving justice than in the case of formal legal systems.⁵⁷ Therefore, legal and legislative reform is vital; however, equal access to justice will not be attained unless the formal legal system becomes accessible at the local level and is favored over customary mechanisms of justice. Alternatively, efforts need to be made to ensure that customary law develops in a fashion that reinforces equity, so as to compliment the legislative reforms in the formal system.



⁵⁷ Nyamu-Musembi, C. 2005.

2.5 Gender Based Poverty

Poverty is generally defined as a state of inadequacy, which is often perceived in terms of basic human needs of food, clothing, shelter, safe water, sanitation, education, health and information. The World Bank defines it further as a state of deprivation of opportunity, security, capability and empowerment.⁵⁸ This graph demonstrates the growth rate of global poverty considering three growth scenarios: predating the COVID-19 crisis; baseline impacts of COVID-19; and downside impacts of COVID-19:⁵⁹



Global extreme poverty has been steadily declining since 1990 to 2017; however, for the first time in over 20 years, it was on the rise following the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁰ Given these projections, in 2020, it was estimated that globally, in the baseline scenario, 88 million people would be pushed into extreme poverty, and in the downside scenario, a high of 115 million people.⁶¹ Research suggests that the region that be hit the hardest will be South Asia (49-57 million), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (26-40 million); as a result, the World Bank estimates that this setback will inhibit the trajectory of progress for at least three years.⁶²

⁵⁸ World Bank Operational Policy 1.00, October 2004.

⁵⁹ World Bank. 2020. p. 5.

⁶⁰ "Poverty". World Bank. 2021.

⁶¹ World Bank. 2020.

⁶² World Bank. 2020. p. 5



While the pandemic had tangible repercussions on virtually every country and citizens across income levels, the economic downturn has exacerbated ongoing socio-economic inequalities and disproportionately affected women. According to the World Bank, across most regions in the world, women are overrepresented in poverty figures; East Asia and Pacific, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa specifically have high female poverty.⁶³ The widest poverty gender gaps are among children as young girls are “more likely than boys to be overrepresented among the poor, as are women in their main reproductive years (ages 25-34) across most world regions”.⁶⁴

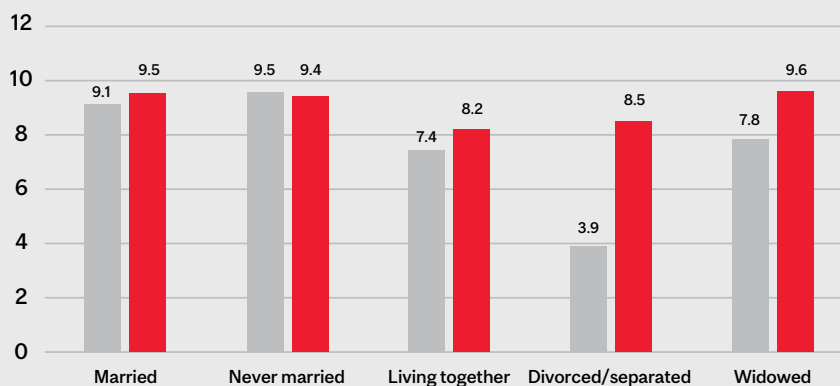
Education is undoubtedly a prerequisite for better employment opportunities, but the high illiteracy rate among women in Africa curtails their access to better and well-paid employment. High illiteracy rates result in a greater proportion of women being engaged in the agricultural sector, but most of their agricultural activity is designed for household consumption. Commercial agriculture requires ownership of assets to enable farmers to borrow, but many women in Africa neither own nor control the use of the land.

Marital Status & Access to Resources⁶⁵

In many countries, marital status and family status, such as single motherhood, often converge to intensify discrimination against women. Laws and customs tend to favour married couples that live together so that rights are only granted to women through their association to a man. These discriminatory legal frameworks perpetuate the notion that men are responsible for economically supporting and physically protecting their family, thus encouraging stigma toward divorced women and single mothers. Moreover, post-marital laws tend to be founded on implicit gender biases regarding gender roles that lead to the unequal distribution of financial and childcare responsibilities being shared between divorced couples. These structural and social barriers to the prosperity of single women exist to restrict female social mobility, income generation and asset accumulation. This is exemplified by data collected from 89 countries, covering an estimated 84 percent of the population in the developing world: across developing and developed nations, single mother headed households are disproportionately subject to extreme poverty and divorced women are twice as likely to be poor than divorced men.

**Extreme Poverty Rate
Among Women and Men
(aged 15+) by Marital
Status, 2009-2003**

■ Male ■ Female



⁶³ World Bank 2020, p. 9.

⁶⁴ World Bank, 2020, p. 9

⁶⁵ Un Women, 2018, p. 137

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Chapter three: Microfinance

3.1 Overview of Microfinance

Microfinance is the supply of loans, savings, and other basic financial services to the poor. Financial services needed by the poor include working capital loans, consumer credit, savings, pensions, insurance, and money transfer services.

The poor rarely access services through the formal financial sector. They address their need for financial services through a variety of financial relationships, mostly informal. Providers of financial services to the poor include donor-supported, nonprofit non-government organizations (NGOs); cooperatives; community-based development institutions like self-help groups and credit unions; commercial and state banks; insurance and credit card companies; wire services; post offices; and other points of sale. NGOs and other non-bank financial institutions have led the way in reaching out to and developing workable credit methodologies for the poor. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, these programs improved upon the original methodologies. They have shown that the poor repay their loans and are willing and able to pay interest rates that cover the costs of providing the loans. The clients of microfinance consist of female heads of households, pensioners, displaced persons, retrenched workers, small farmers, and micro-entrepreneurs.

3.2 Microfinance and Gender

Microfinance has been widely accepted as an effective strategy for poverty reduction, thus can be used to economically empower women. The concept originated from individuals' inability to raise adequate funds to meet specific needs. This prompted individuals who know and trust each other to form groups for resource pooling and saving for a desired goal. This is the basis of SuSu in Ghana and what is known as the Round in other countries. Every month, group members collect an agreed amount from each member and give to the group member whose turn it is to receive the collected funds. A more formal type of microfinance involves group savings, which serve as collateral for group members. A stipulated amount is collected from each group member, collectively banked and used as collateral for members wishing to secure loans. Loan repayment is on a group or individual basis, depending on the level of micro finance in question.

There are five levels of micro finance and knowledge of the different levels is essential for policy recommendations: ⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Honorable Mary Amajo: Paper delivered at Mali workshop on Micro finance organized by the Parliamentary Centre in March 2004.



Level One: Activities undertaken to meet basic human needs, which are not income generating.

Level Two: Involves some form of pre-entrepreneurship with Income Generating Activities (IGAs) conducted on a part-time basis and usually collectively. This group has low entrepreneurial characteristics and the income generated is normally for immediate consumption. These households are also poor but with some potential, which microfinance service providers can improve. Participants at this level of microfinance are referred to as “the Bankable Poor,” and require more entrepreneurial skills training.

Level Three: IGAs are temporary or seasonal and conducted on a part-time basis, with short-term objectives, therefore, are conducted without an eye to economic expansion. For example, microfinance could be utilized during an agricultural harvest season to raise funds to meet school fee costs. This group is categorized as the “economically active poor” and in need of supportive entrepreneurial skills.

Level Four: Participants are micro-entrepreneurs with established premises and employing 0-5 persons. They are also characterized by a limited asset base (about US\$ 3,500) and usually make use of family labor for economic security. This group is much more attractive to Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs).

Level Five: These are more established small-scale entrepreneurs who are profit and growth oriented. They possess sufficient entrepreneurial capabilities and operate on a full-time basis. They have plans and potential for further expansion.

While repayment capacity, collateral availability, and data availability vary across these categories, sustainable methodologies and operational structures have been developed that meet the financial needs of these client groups.

Parliamentarians should advocate for more and better access to credit. Instead of insisting on group borrowing, MFIs could explore ways of extending credit to individuals without compromising the repayment risk. The concept of public works programs, which entail identification of a project by a community and then employing members of that community to execute the project and receive remuneration, was suggested as a better form of empowering women on individual basis. The remuneration from public works program would also obviate the burden of frequent repayments, which were time consuming and deprived a recipient of the time to engage in IGAs.



Example: Group borrowing in Mali

The Parliamentary Centre conducted a workshop in Mali, which included a visit to two groups of women receiving microfinance. One group was at level two and the other was at level four. Both groups borrowed on a group basis as a way of circumventing the collateral problem. The positive impact of microfinance was more evident among the group engaged in micro-enterprises, but both groups reported working very long hours because of the need to balance family needs with the income generating activities. In both cases women were not concerned about working long hours, which they perceived as necessary for repayment of the acquired loan. The level two group repaid the loan on a group basis, and the level four members made individual repayments.

In light of women's citizenship status in Malian society, group borrowing was concluded to be the best option to overcome the problem of collateral. According to the workshop, the group approach was more effective because participants had intimate knowledge of each other and thus, were able to assist other members with repayments when necessary. However, there was risk of failure due to the fact that the group was formed without a project in mind. The need for education in project identification and financial management is a pre-requisite for women to benefit from micro-projects and is critical condition for their success. Education was also emphasized within the context of training women in basic financial analysis to assess the existence of real profit. It was also deemed more prudent for credit suppliers to provide a line of credit for purchase of equipment and payment of related costs, instead of advancing cash in order to maintain women's financial independence from their overbearing spouses.

3.3 Microfinance as a Tool to Reduce Poverty

Financial services for the poor have proved to be a powerful instrument for poverty reduction that enables the poor to build assets, increase incomes, and reduce their vulnerability to economic stress. However, with nearly one billion people still lacking access to basic financial services, especially the very poor, the challenge of providing financial services remains. Convenient, safe, and secure deposit services are a particularly crucial need.

Although governments are not usually good at lending, they play an important role in setting appropriate policies. The key things government can do for microfinance are to maintain macroeconomic stability and avoid interest-rate caps that prevent MFIs from covering their costs and operating sustainably. According to the World Development Report 2006,⁶⁷ increasing poor people's access to credit helps open opportunities for people living in poverty. Studies in India, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, among others, show that the poor pay much higher interest rates than the rich. This means the poor invest less in small businesses than they would if credit markets functioned properly.

⁶⁷ World Bank. 2006. World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development". Washington, DC: World Bank

3.4 The Role of Parliamentarians in Microfinance

The extent of poverty among women is usually perceived as being a problem of access to financial resources, but access alone is not sufficient to economically empower women. Instead, it is the utilization of microfinance that determines whether poverty reduction can be achieved. Economic activities with sustainable demand have a greater potential to reduce poverty in real terms. In Bangladesh microfinance was effective in reducing poverty because recipients engaged in projects with ongoing viability, such as manufacturing LCD batteries, which are in constant demand for lighting in rural areas.⁶⁸ Control over the use of resources determines the balance of power; therefore gender equality requires the victims of poverty to control the use of microfinance.

The lack of access to resources, such as credit facilities, which are necessary for economic activities on a large-scale, pose a challenge for women. It is necessary for government policies to recognize and address this challenge, but the low representation of women in decision-making positions results in this issue receiving less attention than it deserves.

Parliamentarians are able to assist women access resources and credit facilities by:

- Monitoring the performance of institutions dealing with microfinance to ensure funds reach the intended recipients
- Verifying the credibility of microfinance institutions to ensure transparency and accountability in the disbursement and management of microfinance
- Ensuring the existence of mechanisms for dissemination of information on sources of microfinance and training opportunities; and
- Monitoring the government's implementation of the various international conventions on gender equality and lobbying for a quota system for appointments to senior positions in the public and private sector, including microfinance institutions.

⁶⁸ World Bank. January 2001. Engendering Development. World Bank Policy Research Report 2177, Washington, DC



Supporting Women Entrepreneurs Through Microfinance in Central America and the Caribbean⁶⁹

Francis Gutiérrez Cano is a Nicaraguan woman originally from San Juan de Oriente. Her journey of producing pottery began with the microfinance agency Promujer, meaning “Pro woman” that granted her a loan to buy her first pottery machine. Once she began selling pottery, she would use the profits to pay off the loan and request another; each loan was invested back into her business. After six years of hard work, Francis had her very own artisan’s workshop and small business; “I am achieving all the goals I have set for myself with the financial support of the network of microfinance” stated Francis.

Maria de los Ángeles Guevara is a woman originally from the village of El Transito in the district of San Miguel, El Salvador. Maria used credit to buy her first bag of flour and oven to begin her business of baking French bread. Since partnering with the microfinance company ASEI, Maria was able to purchase two more ovens and goes through about 60 bags of flour each week. The success of her business allowed her to open a formal bakery with her family called the “Manna Bakery”.

Francis and Maria are examples of the amazing work that the Central American and Caribbean Microfinance Network (REDCAMIF) is accomplishing across Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic. Through 123 affiliated microfinance institutions, REDCAMIF supports over one million micro and small businesses with the provision of credit and skills training services, with 634,000 of the businesses led by women.

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⁶⁹ UN Women. 2012.

Chapter four: Poverty as deprivation of security

4.1 Impact of Conflict on Vulnerable Groups

The World Bank estimates that in developing nations, the average cost of a civil war is equal to over 30 years of GDP growth.⁷⁰ This is because when a nation's economic resources must be allocated to defence rather than poverty reduction, the country develops a "conflict debt" that cannot be escaped without achieving peaceful relations for a prolonged period of time.⁷¹ Not only does this debt manifest in budgetary constraints, but it can also weaken the nation's resilience to future conflict since it impairs the government's institutional legitimacy and lowers the opportunity cost of engaging in violence for citizens.⁷² Thus, while conflict can be a symptom of a weak state and institutional capacity, it also acts as a contributor to such conditions in the long-term.

Similarly, conflict is both a cause and contributor to poverty, as it undeniably affects vulnerable groups most adversely. This process begins with lack of investment in public education and healthcare, as resources are diverted to the war efforts. Moreover, as seen in many economic phenomena, public perceptions of the future (i.e. fear of prolonged conflict) restrict capital inflows and overall economic activity. Overtime, the deterioration of the nation's human capital leads to reduction in financial capital which will ultimately alter the social fabric of the society.⁷³

"Conflict causes and compounds poverty. First depleting labour and human capital, then destroying productive assets and financial capital, and finally, eroding the social capital of trust and cooperation upon which strong political and economic systems depend."⁷⁴

While conflict affects all people, women and children are the most vulnerable, particularly with regards to the indirect consequences of conflict. In Africa, conflict is one of the causes of poverty due to displacement, destruction of infrastructure, collapse of social services, and violation of human rights resulting in high incidence of HIV/AIDS. As a result of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, 39% of the population lives in poverty.⁷⁵ In summary, since women and children are some of the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly when there is conflict, parliament should use their oversight responsibility to ensure these vulnerable groups are protected.

⁷⁰ Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M., Casabonne, U., Verwimp, P. 2013.

⁷¹ World Bank. 2020.

⁷² Marks, Z. 2016.

⁷³ World Bank. 2020.

⁷⁴ Marks, Z. 2016.

⁷⁵ Reid, K. 2019.



4.2 Gender-Based Violence

Article 1 of the 1993 United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women defines violence against women as being: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Facts about Violence against Women⁷⁶

- An estimated 736 million women, almost 1 in 3, experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently with an intimate partner
- Only 52 percent of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and healthcare
- 71 percent of all human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, and 3 out of 4 of these women and girls are sexually exploited
- Fewer than 40 percent of women subject to violence seek help of any sort
- At least 200 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation

The introduction to this handbook examined the use of biological differences to justify gender roles. Violence is not only a human rights issue, but a development issue due to its effects on victims. Although violence is experienced by both men and women and both can be perpetrators of violence, women and girls constitute the majority of victims of violence because of biological differences between the two sexes. This is because gender-based violence indicates an unequal balance of power between men and women. The perception of men as strong, courageous, aggressive and dominant puts pressure on men to live up to such expectations, sometimes to the detriment of the people around them. While few of these characteristics are biological, the rest are determined by society.

When discussing gender-based violence, it is imperative to consider how the effects of the COVID-19 crisis:

Impact of the Pandemic⁷⁷

- In Argentina, emergency calls for domestic violence have increased by 25 percent since the lockdown began
- In Singapore and Cyprus, calls to helplines have increased by over 30 percent
- In France, reports of domestic violence have increased by 30 percent since the lockdown
- In Australia, 40 percent of frontline workers in a survey reported increased requests for help with violence
- In Canada, Germany, Spain, the UK and the US, increased cases of domestic violence and emergency shelter have also been reported



⁷⁶ UN Women. 2021.

⁷⁷ UN Women. 2020.

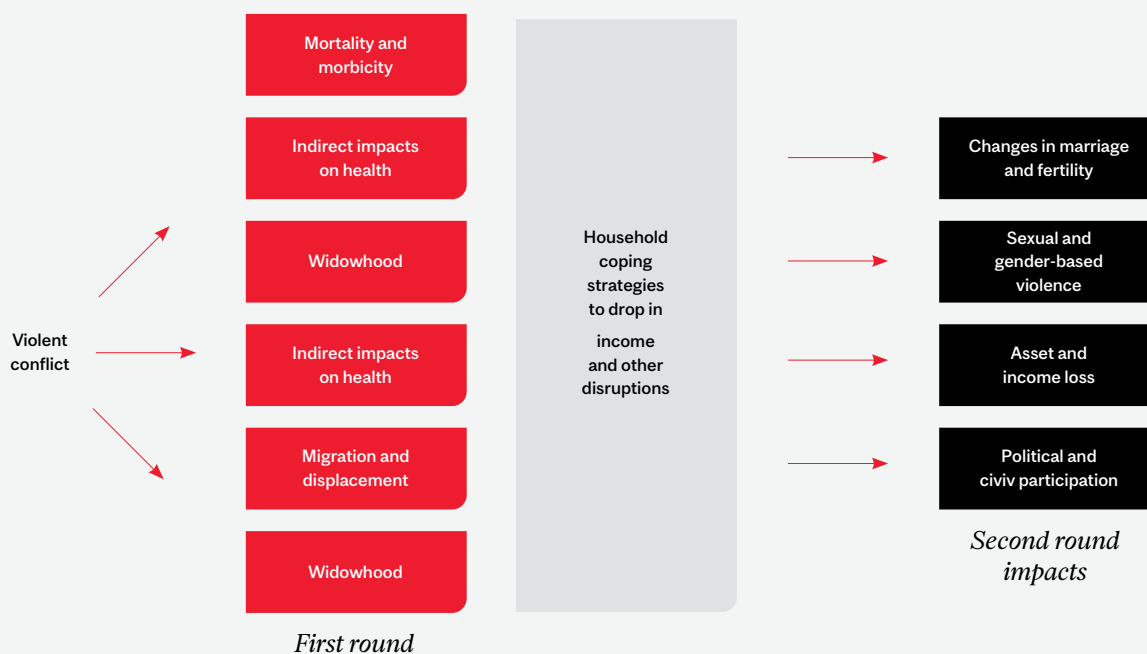
Due to the rapid spread of the virus, many countries implemented public health restrictions such as lockdowns, curfews and other stay-at-home measures that forced women to spend more time at home, potentially trapped with their abusers. Accordingly, in 2020, “for every three months the lockdown continues, an additional 15 million women are expected to be affected by violence” culminating in a 1.5 trillion USD global cost of violence against women.⁷⁸

In light of the repercussions of the pandemic on violence against women and girls (VAWG), particularly domestic violence, the UN has expanded upon its “Unite by 2030 to End Violence against Women” campaign to urge governments to enact policy responses and actions to end gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19. In April 2020, 146 Member States and Observers released a statement demonstrating solidarity and commitment to the cause in response to an appeal by the UN Secretary-General.⁷⁹ Under this campaign, nations are called to pursue four action areas, FUND, PREVENT, RESPOND, COLLECT, to establish concrete policy responses and adopt a zero-tolerance stance towards gender-violence across all spheres of society.⁸⁰ In 2021, the campaign’s advocacy targeted the PREVENT area, demanding the declaration of a national zero tolerance policy, a concrete action plan and a COVID-19 behaviour change social mobilization campaign against VAWG. Overall, parliaments are encouraged to apply a gendered lens to recovery efforts.

4.3 Consequences of Gender-Based Violence

The World Bank uses a framework to illustrate the first round and second round gendered impacts of conflict:

Possible Transmission Channels for the Gender Impacts of Conflict⁸¹



⁷⁸ UN Women. n.d.

⁷⁹ UN Women. n.d.

⁸⁰ UN Women. n.d.

⁸¹ Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M., Casabonne, U., Verwimp, P. 2013.

While men tend to be more impacted by mortality and morbidity, research has shown that women and children are at a higher risk for the indirect impacts on health such as heightened exposure to infectious disease, poor sanitation, lack of healthcare accessibility, etc. In 2019, over 50 percent of all adults living with HIV/AIDS globally were women⁸² and 75 percent of the new HIV infections amongst adolescents were represented by girls.⁸³

Sub-Saharan Africa has been a hotspot since pervasive conflict creates conditions such as sexual violence from militant groups, increased prostitution and refugee movements that encourage the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁸⁴ During the Rwandan genocide, rape was used as a weapon of destruction and ethnic cleansing. As a result, women now constitute the majority of the people living with HIV/AIDS (67 percent)⁸⁵, which affects their ability to effectively engage in productive activities. This is exemplified by the fact that surviving Rwandan widows are disproportionately subject to extreme poverty, creating generational consequences for the children of female-headed households.⁸⁶ Furthermore, in Tanzania, citizens spend 60 percent less time on agricultural activities due to the demand to care for family members and relatives who are sick and suffer from HIV/AIDS. Since women are mostly engaged in agriculture, the inability to produce to one's maximum potential is one of the explanatory reasons for the prevalence of malnutrition and poverty, particularly in a post-conflict situation.

The second-round impacts of conflict can both exacerbate and lessen gender inequality. When a mother has been subjected to domestic violence and is therefore physically unable to cope with the welfare needs of the family, the daughter is often expected to drop out of school in order to assume family responsibilities. The gender issue here is that a withdrawal of the girl child from school is not based on biological differences between boys and girls, but rather societal perceptions of who should perform the domestic welfare duties. Dropping out of school at an early age increases the girl's vulnerability to starting a family at an early age and the potential for a large family. All of these outcomes become a burden to society, which compound and exacerbates the level of poverty. However, a positive second-round consequence can be increased political and civic participation by women and other marginalized groups. Generally, research has found that exposure to conflict led to political activism and elevated participation in groups such as Holocaust survivors and Palestinian victims.⁸⁷ This is because survivors of war tend to congregate to form organizations that advocate for their people and a better tomorrow. In the extreme case of Rwanda, the lack of men following the genocide meant that more women were accepted to leadership positions.

⁸² AmfAR. 2021.

⁸³ UNICEF Data. 2020.

⁸⁴ Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M., Casabonne, U., Verwimp, P. 2013.

⁸⁵ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/16326/wps6371.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁸⁶ Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M., Casabonne, U., Verwimp, P. 2013.

⁸⁷ Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M., Casabonne, U., Verwimp, P. 2013.



4.4 Protecting Victims of Gender-Based Violence

It is clear that gender-based discrimination is prevalent. A specific instance of gender-based discrimination is the requirement that abused women must first complete a form at a police station before they can seek medical attention. Police stations in most cases are non-existent or far away, thereby requiring abused women to travel long distances to complete this requirement before seeking and obtaining any form of medical treatment. Women are discouraged from reporting cases of abuse not only because of these administrative practices, but also due to administrators often being male. Even when administrative authorities are female, the victims' privacy is not guaranteed. One way of enforcing the CEDAW could be the introduction of privacy acts prohibiting the divulging of personal information by police officers or public officials, as well as ensuring the provision of adequate resources for enforcement of the laws. The establishment of a Commission on the Status of Women or a Commission on Gender Equality, which would deal with gender-based violence and appointment of a woman Commissioner can assist in encouraging women to report such abuses. As part of their oversight responsibility, MPs could develop a system to monitor the establishment and effectiveness of the proposed Commission.

4.5 Role of Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians are able to minimize the impact of conflict on vulnerable groups, particularly women, by:

- Analyzing the budget to ensure resources allocated to law enforcement agencies responsible for responding to cases of violence against women
- Investigating the implementation of CEDAW by gender sensitizing the reporting mechanisms for women subjected to sexual violence
- Thoroughly reviewing the laws and policies designed to ensure privacy of women who report cases of sexual violence
- Investigating child protection mechanisms and policies to determine whether they are robust enough to protect children, especially considering the ongoing threat of boys being abducted against their will and forced to fight as child soldiers
- Exploring legislative and policy options to deal with cases of unwanted children born out of sexual violence
- Analyzing the budget to ensure an appropriate allocation of resources targeted toward ameliorating the impact of violence against women, such as funding women's shelters
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the gender focal points and that of the Commission on the Status of Women or Commission on Gender Equality where such an organization exists
- Initiating or adopting laws that guarantee protection of people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly the most vulnerable of this vulnerable group, namely women and little girls

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Chapter five: Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

5.1 What are the SDGs?

In September 2000, members of the United Nations pledged to uphold the principles of humanity by adopting the United Nations Millennium Declaration: a commitment to eradicate poverty. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) consisted of eight goals and 14 targets that aimed to halve the number of people living on less than a dollar a day by the year 2015. In September 2015, the United Nations unveiled its newest agenda at the Sustainable Development Summit: “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets call upon the 193 member states to act in areas beyond poverty, including health, climate change, institution building, gender equality and female empowerment.⁸⁸ At its core, the roadmap identifies five areas of critical importance: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. By pursuing this multifaceted and integrated approach, the new agenda recognizes that a plan to eradicate poverty and “leave no one behind” should consider a range of economic, social and environmental needs.



⁸⁸ <http://www.un.org.cn/info/6/620.html>

⁸⁹ UN Women. 2020.

In order to maintain focus, the SDGs have been scaled down to a lesser number of targets:⁸⁹

Goals	Targets
<p>1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere - Reduce at least by half the proportion of people living in poverty in all its dimensions
<p>2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End hunger and ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round - End all forms of malnutrition
<p>3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births - End preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age - End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases - Reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment - Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all
<p>4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education - Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development
<p>5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere - Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls - Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation - Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
<p>6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water - Achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
<p>7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

<p>8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances
<p>9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being - Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization
<p>10. Reduce inequality within and among countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average - Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all - Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices
<p>11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums
<p>12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production - Achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
<p>13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries - Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
<p>14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds
<p>15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity
<p>16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere - End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
<p>17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms - Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries

*Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

5.2 Lessons from the MDGs

Following the transition from to the SDGs, policymakers, researchers, practitioners and civil society advocates have reflected on the achievements and missteps learned from pursuing the MDGs. Thus, the following is a list of lessons that were drawn from this process through a gendered lens:⁹⁰

- During the MDG period, a significant decline in the number of people living in extreme poverty and reduced gender disparities across all three levels of education were accomplished.
- In areas such as maternal mortality, progress was slower and uneven as efforts failed to address and measure inequalities based on income, race, ethnicity and geographical location.
- The monitoring of progress based on national progress failed to capture inequalities among social groups and left specific groups of women and girls behind.
- Targets and indicators should be defined by what is meaningful to measure rather than the availability to data.
- While the reliance on available data facilitated communication and measurement, it untethered the MDGs from the human rights agenda and ignored global and structural barriers to development.
- The MDG on gender equality sidelined all 12 critical areas of concern that had been featured in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, other than education.
- The goal of sexual and reproductive health was narrowed to just maternal health; this narrow focus diverted attention and resources from areas that were priorities for women's organizations during implementation, such as violence, sexual and reproductive rights and economic inequality.
- The MDGs lacked a framework for monitoring at the national level given the donor-recipient dynamic between developed and developing countries; as a result, developing countries were not answerable and developed countries were not held accountable for their commitments.



⁹⁰ UN Women. 2020. p. 28

5.3 Achieving the SDGs

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has undergone the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.⁹¹ The global unemployment rate has seen a sharp spike and is unlikely to fall below pre-crisis rates as the global workforce grows.⁹² Thus, as some governments attempt to recover through aggressive fiscal consolidation, it is imperative to acknowledge that given factors such as restricted access to labour market earnings, land credit and other assets, women tend to be most adversely impacted by austerity measures.⁹³

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020⁹⁴ outlines the progress made or lack thereof regarding each of the 17 goals:

- 1. Poverty:** Prior to the pandemic, the global trajectory was off track to end poverty by 2030, and since the pandemic, there has been the first increase in global poverty in decades.
- 2. Food insecurity:** Food insecurity was already on the rise and has worsened following the pandemic.
- 3. Health and wellbeing:** The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed decades of improvements.
- 4. Education:** Prior to the pandemic, the trajectory of progress was insufficient, and following the pandemic, nationwide lockdowns have reversed years of progress in educational accessibility.
- 5. Gender equality:** The pandemic has heightened VAWG and domestic responsibilities, worsening gender equality.
- 6. Clean water and sanitation:** Three billion people worldwide lack basic sanitation facilities at home, and by 2030, 700 million people could be displaced by water scarcity.
- 7. Affordable and clean energy:** Investment in renewable energy in developing countries is increasing; however, hundreds of millions of people still lack electricity.
- 8. Work and economic growth:** Global economic growth was declining pre-pandemic, and following the pandemic, the world has faced the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.
- 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure:** The aviation and small business sector of the economy were the most adversely affected by the pandemic, while investment in R&D rose.
- 10. Reduced inequalities:** Prior to the pandemic, the GINI index fell in almost half of the countries measured; however, following the pandemic, marginalized groups have been the most adversely affected.

⁹¹ Gopinath, G. 2020.

⁹² UN Women. 2020.

⁹³ UN Women. 2020.

⁹⁴ UN. 2020.



11. **Sustainable cities and communities:** Prior to the pandemic, the proportion of urban populations living in slums was on the rise, and since the pandemic, urban areas have been hotspots for spreading the virus.
12. **Responsible consumption and production:** There has been little to no progress in sustainable resource consumption and production practices.
13. **Climate action:** Global temperatures have continued to rise, and investment in fossil fuels remains greater than that invested into climate change efforts.
14. **Life below water:** While ocean acidification remains an issue, protected areas have increased, and reduced travel and activity due to the pandemic may give a chance for oceans to recover.
15. **Life on land:** Little to no progress has been achieved in successfully halting biodiversity loss.
16. **Peace, justice and strong institutions:** The global homicide rate has declined slightly; however, the pandemic has posed increased threats to global peace and security.
17. **Partnership for the goals:** Following the pandemic, remittances to low- and middle-income countries are projected to fall.

5.4 The SDGs and Gender Equality

The identification of gender equality as a specific goal is a step forward and recognizes the importance of utilizing all available human resources and social capital for development. However, as previously discussed, gender relates to social roles, and these permeate all aspects of the development process; hence the goal of gender equality cannot be achieved in isolation from other SDGs. As learned with work done for the MDGs, no one solution will solve gender inequality; countries must consider the dimensions of sustainable development and their political underpinnings in order to achieve meaningful change. Therefore, from the perspective of the SDGs with gender-specific indicators, a thorough assessment of relevant issues and necessary solutions are detailed below.

Goal 1: Poverty Eradication

- Prior to the pandemic, the gender gap in working poverty had almost been eliminated; however, working women have been shown to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, particularly young women.
- On a global scale, for every 100 men aged 25-34, 122 women in the same age group live in extreme poverty, and this figure rises to 132 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Progress in regions where extreme poverty is higher amongst women will need to be accomplished, namely in Central and Southern Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean, Oceania (not including Australia and New Zealand), and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Research has shown that access to cash for women not only works to eliminate poverty but also contributes to better education, health and nutrition.
- Discriminatory legal frameworks and customary laws that restrict women's access to inheritance, land, property and credit need to be eradicated to improve female mobility and economic independence.

Goal 2: Hunger

- 11 percent of the global population lives in hunger, with the greatest proportion in Sub-Saharan Africa – a trajectory that will result in the SDG being missed by 2030.
- Even in developed economies such as the United Kingdom, hunger remains a prevalent problem, demonstrating the need for better income and social equality.
- In nearly two-thirds of countries, women are more likely to report food insecurity than men.
- A leading cause of maternal mortality is anemia which is often caused by insufficient nutrient intake.
- Strategies to eradicate food insecurity should look to target at-risk groups, such as women living in rural areas, women with lower levels of education and women living in the poorest quintile.

Goal 3: Health and Wellbeing

- Maternal mortality has decreased by 44 percent from 1995 – 2015; the greatest progress was observed in Eastern Asia.
- Sub-Saharan Africa exhibits the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.
- While the risk of maternal mortality globally is 1 in 4900, this figure rises to 1 in 180 in developing nations and to just 1 in 54 in fragile states where conflict has deteriorated healthcare systems.
- Adequate antenatal and post-natal care, skilled health professionals and access to medical care for health conditions are crucial to reducing the number of maternal deaths.

- Universal access to sexual and reproductive rights is essential to bettering the health of women and girls.
- Greater resources must be allocated to groups that demonstrate elevated death rates, including African American women, low-income women and women living in rural areas.
- Women comprise 70 percent of global healthcare workers, meaning there is a greater risk of them being infected by COVID-19; data from the Dominican Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Spain found that 72 percent of infected healthcare workers were women

Goal 4: Quality Education

- An estimated 15 million girls will never become literate or attend primary school compared to 10 million boys.
- Over the last 15 years, the gender gap in primary and secondary school enrollment has narrowed.
- Poverty is consistently correlated with lack of education; women in poor households are significantly more illiterate, which in turn heightens barriers to escaping poverty.
- The high fertility rate of a teenage mother implies a larger family and, in turn, greater population growth rates than corresponding economic growth rates, outstripping any benefit that might be garnered from improved economic development.
- Each additional year of post-primary education for young girls has been shown to heighten employment outcomes, decrease the chance of early marriage and improve health and wellbeing.
- Equality in access to education will boost female empowerment and employment as well as stimulate economic growth.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Discrimination

- Over the last quarter-century, legislation has been passed that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex with respect to inheritance and citizenship.

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sought to eradicate laws that discriminate against women by 2005, which has been failed to be achieved:
- In 18 countries, men can legally prevent women from working.
- In 39 countries, daughters lack the same inheritance rights as sons.
- In 49 countries, there are no laws protecting women against domestic violence.
- In 37 countries, rapists can be exempt from prosecution if they marry the victim.
- Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality are necessary.

Violence

- The prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst 17 countries suggested that it is generally falling, particularly in countries that exhibit high rates, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (fell from 59 percent to 39 percent).
- Regionally, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) exhibits the highest rate of IPV (40 percent) while Europe and North America exhibit the lowest rate (6 percent).
- Nonetheless, there has been a sharp spike in domestic violence following the pandemic – a trend that has been observed across the globe.
- Progress needs to be made to reduce violence in educational settings, given one in four girls report feeling unsafe using school latrines; 23 percent of female undergraduate university students reported experiences of sexual assault or misconduct.

Harmful practices

- Central and Southern Asia have the highest rates of child marriage (43 percent); in Sub-Saharan Africa, rates can vary from 76 percent in Niger to less than 10 percent in Namibia.
- The extent of regional variations due to location, income and other factors highlights the need for a targeted strategy, directing efforts at the areas that need it most.
- In a 2016 report to the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on torture affirmed that child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and ‘honor crimes’ constitute torture.
- Unless progress is accelerated, the number of girls married before the age of 18 will rise to 16.5 million in 2030.

- While rates of FGM have fallen in some places, high prevalence remain across Sub-Saharan Africa – 85 percent or more in Sudan, Somalia, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone and Djibouti.
- The current trajectory will result in the rates of FGM rising over the next 15 years.
- Laws need to prohibit the practice as well as social interventions to tackle attitudes that encourage FGM to occur.

Unpaid and domestic work

- Across 83 countries, women were the main caregivers spending 18 percent of their time daily on unpaid care and domestic work, while men allocate only 7 percent.
- The division of labour begins at an early age: in 33 countries, girls aged 7-14 do more household work and caring for siblings than their male siblings of the same age.
- The group that spends the most time is women aged 25-44, given that these are peak childbearing years.
- Variations exist depending on resources such as household income, access to drinking water, fuel at home and policies related to childcare.

Participation and opportunities for leadership

- Women's participation in politics and decision-making has been shown to positively impact public spending and service provision.
- In the private sector, women's representation has been associated with higher stock prices and profits; however, less than a third of senior and middle management positions globally are held by women.
- Parliamentary participation has been steadily increasing (23.7 percent); only two nations have a female majority in parliament – Rwanda (61 percent) and Bolivia (53 percent).
- Electoral gender quotas and other temporary special measures (TSMs) have led to great progress and prevented backsliding across Sub-Saharan Africa and increased representation of racial minorities in Latin America.
- Less than half the countries in the world still lack legislative quotas – this will likely need to change to achieve goals of gender equality.
- Periodic reviews of quotas and other TSMs should be conducted to ensure they do not impose an inadvertent glass ceiling on women.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

- Only 52 percent of married women can freely make decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and healthcare.
- Lack of quality education on harmful practices and sexual health act as barriers to these rights for adolescent girls.
- Childbirth and pregnancy complications remain one of the leading causes for the death of girls aged 15-19.
- Cost remains the largest barrier to accessing healthcare across 65 countries.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Labour participation rate (LFPR) among women aged 25-54 was 63 percent compared to 94 percent for male counterparts.
- Large regional variations exist, the most significant in North Africa and Central, Southern and Western Asia, where there are gaps of nearly 60 percentage points and LFPR remain below 40 percent.
- The global gender gap in LFPR has remained unchanged over the last 20 years; Latin America and the Caribbean are notable exceptions where considerable progress has been made.
- The global gender pay gap stands at 23 percent, and the gap is slowly decreasing; however, targeted action is needed since, at the current rate, equal pay will not be achieved until 2086.
- Gender-based occupational segregation is the key driver of the pay gap.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

- Income inequality has risen over the last quarter-century in both OECD and developing countries.
- Intrahousehold inequality (like between husband and wife) greatly contributes to overall income inequality (30 percent).
- In all countries studied, single-mother households are most likely to fall below the 50 percent median income mark.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

- In 67 percent of countries, over half of the female urban population aged 15-49 lives in slums in which they lack at least one of the following: access to clean water, improved sanitation facilities, durable housing or sufficient living areas.
- The two most prevalent unmet household needs are durable housing materials and lack of improved sanitation facilities; lack of these resources disproportionately impact women as they spend more time at home and thus are exposed more to hygiene risks.

Goal 13: Climate Action

- Poor women in rural areas and indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by climate change because they depend on local natural resources.
- In Asia and Africa, the majority of women are employed in the agricultural sector, meaning that they will be susceptible to food insecurity as climate change inhibits production.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

- Almost half of all female homicide victims died at the hands of an intimate partner or family member.
- Conflict and post-conflict states have the highest sexual violence rates and likelihood of sexual violence by police or military personnel.
- Research has shown that when women have access to decision-making and political positions, they play a vital role in peacebuilding and preventing conflict.

5.5 Oversight Role of Parliamentarians for Achievement of Gender Equity

Research has found a strong correlation between democracy and gender equality, suggesting that these qualities and good oversight are tightly interwoven. On the other hand, corruption in parliament has been shown to restrict women's access to parliament, further supporting the rhetoric for a relationship between gender equality and democracy. Thus, in exercising their oversight function to promote equity regardless of gender, parliaments strengthen the overall accountability of their democratic institutions. However, in light of the pandemic's repercussions, it is evident that progress has backslid, and many countries will not achieve

the SDGs within the expected timeframe. With that said, it is more important than ever for parliamentarians to ensure that government policies adhere to the intended objectives and look to strengthen overall gender equality. Legislatures can ensure coherence between policy pronouncements and action by:

- Mainstreaming gender in the development process, which will require a change of attitudes towards women. Attitudes will only begin to evolve when all change agents are involved in making policies and resources are devoted to bringing about change; parliaments have a role to play in ensuring all stakeholders and change agents, specifically women, are consulted and participate in the development process.
- Despite the ratification of CEDAW by governments, women continue to suffer from discrimination. Parliamentarians should ensure those tasked with implementing CEDAW and any affiliated policies have received gender sensitivity training and have adequate resources to enforce implementation.
- Since women are major victims of HIV/AIDS, parliament should ensure legislation and policies are in place that provide women with the information they need about how they can prevent contracting HIV, along with information about treatment and drugs.
- The majority of women are still employed in agriculture but often do not own the land. Parliamentarians can urge the introduction of legislation and recommend policies that promote equal ownership of land, such as requiring land registration certificates to bear the names of both spouses.
- Parliament has an important role to play in the oversight of Poverty Reduction Strategy Process Papers (PRSPs) through a PRSP or a Budget Standing Committee.
- Women's representation in parliament has been found to correlate with overall gender equality in a country. As such, parliaments and political parties should use/develop temporary special measures such as gender electoral quotas and/or reserved seats to increase women's political participation.
- Mechanisms such as cross-party women's caucuses have been shown to be effective in encouraging women to support one another, work on issues of common concern, develop strategies for change and better connect with civil society organizations. Thus, parliaments, political parties and government should encourage female political leadership through mentorship in parliament and political parties, support for women's civic groups and the encouragement of cross-party women's caucuses in parliament.
- Develop better indicators, such as in the Human Development Index, that present gender differences to develop appropriate gender-differentiated policies.

- Conduct more comprehensive research on the gender differential effects of corruption, especially regarding access to public services and financial resources, the application of the rule of law (and in providing protection from abuse) and access to decision-making, including political participation.
- Ensure and monitor the implementation of anti-corruption laws and frameworks.
- Adopt laws that request processes for developing and reviewing national policies and plans that are participatory and inclusive.
- Insist that the executive government develops gender-sensitive budgets where budget item goals and costs are broken down by gender, and adequate financial resources are allocated towards achieving the SDGs.
- Request that the supreme audit institution (e.g. Auditor General) disaggregated their assessments by gender in value-for-money and other audits.
- In legislatures that lack a critical mass of women, support female parliamentarians through training, the occupancy of leadership positions and through the creation of cross-party women's groups.

Gender-Responsive Evaluation Guidelines in Zimbabwe⁹⁵

“In Zimbabwe, UN Women is supporting the Government in operationalizing the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy adopted in 2015. Guided by 10 principles, including transparency, accountability and gender equality, the policy has ushered in efforts to develop gender-responsive national evaluation guidelines to improve accountability in the implementation of gender equality commitments in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The guidelines will be developed with the active engagement of government ministries, evaluation experts and development partners.”



⁹⁵ UN Women. 2018. p. 43

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Chapter six: Gender budgeting

6.1 Definition of Budget

The budget is a document detailing financial plans for a specified forthcoming period. In most countries, the national budget is drafted by the government. The formulation process and the period covered vary between countries, but in all cases, it is drafted at regular intervals. Generally, the budget has two components: revenue and expenditure. Besides being an instrument for specifying revenue measures and the distribution of resources, the budget is employed as a mechanism for macroeconomic stabilization. Therefore, an understanding of how the budget is formulated is essential when parliamentarians seek to identify points of entry where they can advocate for more resources for gender equality policies.

The revenue side of the budget is comprised of income tax, corporate tax, sales tax, any excise duty and aid inflows. The expenditure side is made up of capital and recurrent expenditure. In developed countries, capital expenditure may form a small part of the budget, while in developing countries, it might be the opposite. Capital expenditure refers to the construction of infrastructures such as roads, schools, hospitals, dams and the cost of relevant equipment. Recurrent expenditure covers salaries and all other running expenses. Since the government is the major employer in most developing countries, the recurrent expenditure budget thus tends to be greater than capital expenditure.

6.2 Revenue Side of Budget

When projected expenditure exceeds anticipated revenue, the difference is the budget deficit. A government can plan for a budget deficit and introduce measures to finance that deficit or borrow on the local money market. From the post-World War II era until the early 1990s, budget deficits were encouraged as a mechanism for stimulating economic growth, but they became unsustainable in the aftermath of the oil price increase in the late 1970s. This pushed up production costs such that companies had to either curtail production or retrench some of their employees. Maintaining budget deficits also implied that the government, which is a service provider, was pushing up the cost of borrowing. This resulted in high interest rates and discouraged borrowing by the private sector, which would normally have been used to stimulate economic growth. This phenomenon is referred to as “crowding out.” Instead of stimulating economic growth, the budget deficits were stifling it since the private sector was reducing the level of production due to the high interest rates.

Some governments have tried to finance the budget deficit by introducing revenue measures such as sales tax and excise duties on luxury goods like cigarettes and alcohol and on items with inelastic demand such as gas or petrol, which consumers still purchase even at very high prices. While income tax is progressive (implying that those with high salaries pay more tax) and is supposed to be sensitive to vulnerable groups, revenue measures such as sales tax which is payable at the same rate by the rich and poor can have a negative impact on the very vulnerable groups being protected by the progressive income tax system. A tax on items considered luxury goods that are consumed by those with higher incomes (i.e. gas or petrol) can also negatively impact the poor as production costs are passed on to consumers in price increases of even the basic goods demanded by the poor.

Some tax policies provide for a lower tax rate for a man with a specified number of children; this is rooted in the assumption that the man is the head of the household, but the policy discriminates against female-headed households. Discriminatory tax policies can discourage groups, such as women, from actively participating in the labour market or on a part-time basis, which affects their potential for being promoted to senior or decision-making positions or accumulating enough savings for investment in expensive capital equipment necessary for income generation.

6.3 Expenditure Side of Budget

Expenditure allocations in a national budget provide specified amounts to line ministries to deliver services and develop infrastructure. The expenditure side indicates the number of people who are presently employed or are to be employed by a line ministry, along with the services and infrastructure to be provided during the budget period. Without disaggregated statistics, it is not possible to determine how different groups in a society will benefit from the proposed expenditure. In most countries, budget allocations to health, education and defence account for the major proportion of the budget, but the impact on the different groups is not evident due to the absence of disaggregated statistics. Parliamentary involvement is necessary at the formulation stage of the budget (whether formal or informal) in order to assess whether the proposed expenditures reflect equitable benefits to men and women.

6.4 Budget Formulation and the Budget Cycle

The formulation and process of the budget involve seven key players: the Ministry of Finance, line ministries, the cabinet, the legislature, internal and external audit, the media and aid donors, as they are a source of revenue. The Ministry of Finance is the major participant in the process of budget formulation and control of expenditure in most countries. In consultation with revenue agencies such as the Department of Taxes, Department of Customs, the Central Bank (or Reserve Bank), the Ministry of Finance will determine the macroeconomic projections and guidelines and provide budget limits to line ministries. Line ministries are responsible for collection of the proposed sectoral expenditures through a process of consultation between them and the

public. In some countries, line ministries will negotiate with the Ministry of Finance on the specific expenditure line items, and on the basis of the agreed expenditures, the Ministry of Finance will produce the draft estimates of expenditure which must be approved by the cabinet. The consultation process between the Ministry of Finance and line ministries may or may not involve parliamentarians. In Uganda, the budget law gives the Parliamentary Budget Committee authority to be involved in the budget planning process prior to the tabling of the estimates of expenditure in the Parliament. The process in other countries is such that parliamentarians have no input until the budget is tabled in Parliament when they are expected to debate and approve the proposed expenditures. In Canada, there are formal budget consultations that take place prior to the estimates of expenditure being tabled in the Parliament. Even in countries where there is no formal intervention by parliamentarians, there are some informal consultations between parliamentarians and the officials from the Ministry of Finance responsible for the preparation of the budget.

The tabling of the estimates of expenditure is followed by budget review by committees and parliamentary debates. In most countries, once the budget has been approved by the cabinet and submitted to parliament, the government is very reluctant to make any adjustments. However, parliament usually has the right to amend, reject or send back the budget to the government to redraft sections it deems unacceptable. For example, in the United States, the Senate blocked the passage of the budget in the 1990s and government departments could not incur any expenditure until the impasse was resolved. Parliamentary budget review requires research, hearings and investigation by committees, particularly the Budget Committee (where such a committee exists). The Finance Committee also plays an important role in reviewing the impact of the proposed revenue measures. For example, if the government proposes to finance a budget deficit with loans, the Finance Committee can advise against ratification of such loans because of inflationary implications or the burden on future generations. However, the review process is not limited only to the two committees but involves all parliamentarians; it is a process by which the legislature exercises its oversight role by requiring the government to explain any inconsistencies between government policies and the proposed expenditures. The review period varies in different countries, but generally is a lengthy process in almost all cases. If the budget is approved, expenditures can be incurred, but only to the limits set in the budget. Prior to the approval of the budget, some countries have a provision in the Audit and Exchequer Act or similar legislation, which allows line ministries to incur expenditure not exceeding a given percentage of the budget. When the budget has been approved by parliament, the implementation of programs will be in accordance with the provisions of the Audit Act or similar legislation.

6.5 Monitoring of Expenditure

The regular monitoring of expenditure is conducted through internal and external audits. Usually, the Auditor-General will conduct an audit of the line ministries' accounts and produce financial statements at the end of the fiscal year. The Auditor General's report is made public, thus assisting the media in keeping the government accountable. The report is also tabled in parliament. The Public Accounts Committee, which also monitors the implementation of the budget, also actively uses the audit to keep ministries accountable, notably by

inviting ministries to explain any irregularities or occurrences where the ministries flout the regulations. The committee's recommendations are submitted to the government for incorporation in the next budget cycle. During implementation, some unanticipated expenditure may occur, for instance, a by-election or national election. The line ministry responsible for such expenditure is required to seek parliamentary approval for the expenditure through a supplementary budget. Any expenditure exceeding the original or supplementary budget constitutes unauthorized expenditure, which is subject to investigation by the Auditor-General.

A somewhat distinct but related system works in countries influenced by the French legal and parliamentary system, where the government has more independence from the parliament. A system of *cour des comptes* (courts of audit) reviews expenditures and budget implementation in a context in which judicial decisions can be made against those responsible for irregularities. The reports from these *cours* are, as a rule, reported to the parliament and help shape ongoing budget decisions, but parliaments themselves do not have to recommend specific actions against individual culprits, as in the Westminster system. Nor is a single Auditor-General responsible for financial review; instead, a larger number of independent members of the audit courts make decisions collectively.

Independent audit reports are also of interest to donors, who require governments' account for how the funds provided by donors were used. The donors will change or maintain their aid policies on the basis of the recipient country's accountability. Negative Auditor-Generals' reports may result in withdrawal or reduced levels of aid. For example, to enforce budgetary discipline, the World Bank imposed a cash budget system for Zambia, implying that the country could only spend up to the amount available in cash, a system that can make planning a difficult task.

6.6 Medium Term Expenditure Framework

Prior to the scrutiny of budget deficits, governments operate on incremental budgets, which imply that the previous year's budget formed the basis of the next budget cycle. If budgeting is about the efficient allocation of resources, then the incremental budget system encourages inefficiency. For example, before the end of the fiscal year, ministries would purchase unnecessary items simply because any unspent funds are perceived as a sign of inadequate absorptive capacity and hence a reason for reduction of the next budget for that ministry. Once resources were allocated to one ministry, there was no mechanism for reallocating the funds to another ministry in need, thus triggering unavoidable or unanticipated expenditure. The ministry in need of additional funds would go through the tedious process of seeking a supplementary budget approval while another ministry was carrying excess funds. Therefore, efficient resource allocation was a major reason for the introduction of Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) budgets.

MTEF budgets provide an indication of resources available for a period of about three years (in most countries), although estimates of expenditures are approved on an annual basis. Thus, MTEF budgets are

an improvement on incremental budgets in that a ministry has the flexibility to introduce new programs/ projects and can also plan for a longer period than one year, which is impossible with incremental budgets. In addition, MTEF budgets allow parliamentarians to exercise their oversight responsibility by monitoring budget implementation and questioning budget allocations, which may be contradictory to government policy statements. An example of the advantage of MTEF is the South African Budget Initiative, which questioned the continued high allocation of resources to the Ministry of Defense when the country was no longer operating under threat posed by the apartheid era. As a result of this intervention, resources were reallocated to the education and health sectors, which benefit women the most.

6.7 What is Gender Budgeting?

It is important to emphasize from the outset that a gender budget does not refer to a separate budget for women. As previously indicated, gender is not just about women. Gender budgeting considers the inequalities that arise due to the different roles assigned to different groups in society. National budgets are developed as gender-neutral, but there is increasing recognition by governments that budgetary policies have different impacts on men and women. As an instrument for the allocation of resources in a society, the budget is probably the most effective mechanism that can be employed towards the attainment of objectives such as gender equality. The national budget is also an indicator of a government's priorities and hence a tool for measuring the consistency between pronouncements on gender equality and the resources allocated to achieving it.

Case Study: Overcoming Illiteracy Among Women in Decision-Making

The poor are often excluded from the decision-making process on the grounds of illiteracy, but in an innovative way, a community radio project in rural Ghana helped involve women who were often excluded from decision-making. The radio station in a rural part of Ghana worked with the community to develop community consensus over priority projects for their area. The community was divided into three groups: men, women and youth. Each group had to rank five proposed projects in order of priority. The ranking system was conducted through the use of small sticks, and each group would put the greatest number of sticks on the most desired project. The proposed projects included: water, roads, health clinic, school and sanitation. The men and youth groups ranked water as their number one priority, while women singled out roads as the highest priority, contrary to the presumption that women would choose water since they often walk long distances in search of water. As it turned out, the water in the area was salty and the fresh water was supposed to be delivered by trucks. However, trucks were not coming due to the poor status of the roads. The use of sticks in determining priorities allowed the illiterate to fully participate in the decision-making process. The discussion with the women revealed that the distortions in budget allocations, which arise due to the assumption that illiteracy impedes participation in poverty reduction, can be countered. Failure to consult widely, including with marginalized groups such as illiterate women, leads to the inefficient utilization of resources.

Case Study: South Africa Gender Budget Initiative

An example of an effective partnership between the parliament and civil society is South Africa's Women Budget Initiative, which was a coalition of parliamentary committees and two non-governmental organizations: The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa. The Women Budget Initiative made a significant impact on budget reform by conducting an analysis of the budget allocations from a gendered perspective. One of the outcomes was a report prepared by the Ministry of Finance for the Parliamentary Committee on Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women. As part of its compliance with the implementation of CEDAW, the Ministry of Finance appointed a Tax Commission, which reviewed the tax system and found the tax policy was discriminatory on the basis of gender and marital status. The Pension Fund laws were also found to be discriminatory, with income differential implications between men and women. Women contributed 6 percent while men contributed 8 percent of their salary towards pension, which implied a higher pension income for men than women, but that has been amended, resulting in a uniform level of contribution. A widower's pension has also been introduced instead of just the widow's pension. The Women Budget Initiative also brought attention to the skewed budget allocation towards defense expenditures, which were no longer necessary, and the Ministry of Finance responded by reducing that expenditure from 9.1 percent of the budget in 1992/93 to 5.7 percent in 1997/98.

6.8 Gender Analysis of Budget

Analyzing the budget from a gender perspective provides a useful mechanism to assess the effects of government policies on men and women and the real contributions that all individuals make to the economy. In this way, government can evolve and implement policies that ensure equity. Since poverty is most prevalent among women, gender budgeting is one of the components of the Ghana Parliamentary project, which commissioned the Centre for Social Policy Studies at the University of Ghana to conduct a gender analysis of the Ghanaian 2005 budget. The analysis focused on access to productive resources and women's participation in public life. The analysis focused on the following four broad categories of the budget:

- Economic policy
- Sector Expenditure and gender-sensitivity
- Gender and revenue projections
- Budget as an instrument for promoting economic and social rights



Economic Policy

The language used by government officials indicated an absence of gender sensitivity. Language in economic policy and budget statements made no reference to gender considerations, implying that the policies have the same impact on men and women. However, in reality, there is a continued disparity between the two sexes. For example, the PRSP in Ghana is supposed to provide affordable access to healthcare, particularly for the poor and vulnerable. Once again, this statement assumes that women and children, who are the poorest of the poor, would automatically benefit from affordable health care.

Sector Expenditure Analysis

The budgetary allocation for water and sanitation was designed to increase facilities generally so as to meet the SDG targets. Such an allocation, once again, assumes women would be direct beneficiaries. However, whether women would benefit from the allocation depends on the location of the water projects and the type of sanitation. With respect to the agriculture sector, budgetary support was provided for cocoa and shea butter production, but there was no complementary allocation to shea nut production where most women are involved. Also, women only had limited access to agricultural finance, and there was no budget allocation for microfinance aimed at women's groups. Only education and health included statements about the improvement of services to women, matched by the requisite resources.

Gender refers not only to women but to men, boys and girls, yet the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment has no program for the welfare of girls or women. Responsibility for programs targeted toward women and girls is assumed to be under the portfolio of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, but the allocation for Discretionary Expenditure to the Ministry only increased marginally.

Gender, Revenue and Budget Allocations

The personal tax relief proposed in the budget was intended to cushion the impact of higher petroleum prices on persons with relatively low incomes but had no significant impact on women who are mostly engaged in the informal sector. The petrol tax, designed as a source of revenue for enhancing the provision of services to the poor, has a negative impact on women due to the subsequent increase in production costs, which are passed onto consumers, thus making women, who are the majority of the poor, more vulnerable.

The Budget as an Instrument of Women's Rights

Public funds are collectively generated, and citizens have a right to claim these resources. Inequity in the allocation of resources represents a denial of rights to some sections of the population. Gender responsive budgets provide a mechanism for reducing the disparities that exist between men and women.



6.9 Oversight Role of Parliamentarians in Gender Budgeting

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in ensuring that governments uphold the rights of all citizens. The budget is the most important mechanism for equitable distribution of resources and should be used to attain gender equality. Parliamentarians need to be conversant with the budget cycle process in order to effectively exercise their oversight role. It is often assumed that a national budget is gender-neutral, that in its functions, a budget will benefit women and men, girls and boys equally. In fact, by failing to take account of the different roles, capabilities and needs of women and men, budgets can reinforce existing inequality. Success in reducing inequality and poverty will entail the following action by parliamentarians:

- Ensure the allocation of sufficient funds to ministries and departments involved in programs and projects addressing gender equality issues.
- Insist on transparency in the formulation of the poverty reduction programs and the budget in order to allow participation by grassroots-based organizations, such as women's groups.
- Request gender disaggregated statistics to assess the impact of proposed resource allocation on all groups in society.
- Where necessary, recommend the introduction of MTEF budgets to allow sectoral analysis of expenditure line items to ascertain the impact on different groups. And recommend the reallocation of resources to expenditure items such as education and health that have a direct benefit to marginalized groups like women and children.
- Insist on the use of language that affirms the political leadership's commitment to gender equality.
- Encourage development of grassroots decentralized mechanisms to assist parliamentarians with monitoring of the budget preparation process and ensure involvement of people at community level so that the budget is truly responsive to their needs.
- Examine tax laws with a view to recommending amendments or the introduction of new laws that are gender sensitive.
- Analyze revenue measures, such as sales and fuel taxes, for impact on vulnerable groups such as women.
- Monitor the utilization of allocated resources, and whether the stated objectives have been achieved.
- Collaborate with civil society groups to collect information on the impact of resource allocation on different groups
- Analyze whether resource allocations to particular sectors, undertaken in line with macroeconomic policies, benefit women.

Chapter seven: Gender and parliamentary participation

7.1 Composition of Parliamentary Committees

Parliament undertakes much of its business using various parliamentary committees, which in most cases replicate or emulate government ministries. The number and size of committees are usually determined by the size of parliament. Large parliaments tend to have more committees than smaller parliaments. Committee membership varies with different parliamentary systems. In most parliaments, where there is a multi-party political system, committee members are appointed by the various political parties. The parliamentarians are usually appointed to committees based on their expertise or interest.

The choice of committees poses a challenge for new parliamentarians, particularly women who may feel intimidated by the perception of male members' wider knowledge of issues. As a result, most women parliamentarians end up joining committees related to social welfare issues. Money Committees such as the Public Accounts Committee require extensive knowledge of the Audit and Exchequer Act or similar legislation and the functioning of civil service functions. Due to the social roles adopted by women, which expect them to perform domestic roles, most women's experience lies in professions unrelated to finance. The lack of broad experience manifests itself in the low levels of female representation in committees requiring technical expertise, thus explaining the concentration of women in welfare committees such as education, health and gender. In developed countries, there is greater women representation in the technical committees as the gender gap has narrowed in the education system. The changing level of representation in committees confirms the importance, not only of education, but gender mainstreaming in all aspects of human relations in most developed countries.

7.2 Functioning of Committees

Committee operations can be compared to the functioning of a restaurant. Most of the work and food preparation takes place in the backroom - the kitchen. Committees are the back room of parliament where most of the work is conducted. Committees are a forum where the concerns of the constituency can be brought to the attention of parliament and through parliament to the government. National or community issues are brought to the attention of parliamentarians through meetings, political rallies by civil society groups, the media and audit reports. In some countries, it is the Clerk of Parliament's responsibility to draw up the committee calendar in consultation with the committee chairpersons, who in turn are responsible for consultation with the committee members. Some gender-sensitive committee chairs will allocate more time to female members of the committee to speak during committee sessions due to women's low representation in parliament. It is also the chairperson's responsibility to ensure that women members are not discouraged by their male counterparts.

The major role of committees is to scrutinize bills proposed by the government. The committee members, who put items on the agenda, are expected to lead the discussion on that issue, which requires research and, in some cases, may involve allowing relevant individuals or organizations to present to the committee. In order to gain a better understanding of a problem or issue, committee work may also involve onsite investigations or visits. For instance, a Public Accounts Committee can visit a country's diplomatic mission to investigate the utilization of public funds or the competence of the staff representing the interests of the nation. Based on the committee's findings, a recommendation can be made to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to increase or reduce staff at a specific mission or increase the budget allocation.

The Public Accounts Committee's role is to ensure the utilization of public funds in accordance with the budget law of the country. In most countries, information is provided to the committee by the Office of the Auditor-General (where such an office exists), and the committee summonses the head of the ministry to respond to their questions. Some of the issues addressed by the Public Accounts Committee include flouting of tender regulations, incurring of unauthorized expenditure by ministries, non-adherence to reporting procedures and the effectiveness of the accounting system. If the committee is not satisfied with the ministry's responses to the committee's inquiries, it can recommend that the ministry execute the policy or action as stipulated in the budget law or can demand the resignation of the minister in charge of the ministry concerned.

7.3 Gender Dimensions of Committee Operations

As discussed earlier, the low representation of women in parliament implies low representation in committees, particularly in the technical committees. Most of the technical committees are therefore chaired by men. Nordic countries attempted to raise women's confidence by requiring that a deputy chair of some of the technical committees be a woman and that the few women involved in such committees be allocated more debating time during the committees' meeting and during question time on the floor of the parliament.

The lack of or perceived lack of expertise of women in committees often results in their exclusion from delegations sent to acquire knowledge or to investigate issues of interest to such committees. This point was made strongly by some women parliamentarians during a workshop on lessons learned, which members of Ghanaian Parliamentary committees from one term of parliament could pass onto the incoming committees after the national elections held in December 2004.⁹⁶ An example cited was the composition of delegations to the peace process negotiations. Despite women and children being the most affected by conflict situations, women parliamentarians were excluded from delegations discussing such pertinent issues. This is also considering that, in 2001, research found that when female representation in Parliament increases by 5%, a nation is approximately five times less likely to respond to an international crisis with violence.⁹⁷ This pattern has also been acknowledged by the United Nations, which attests to women playing a key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ From the Parliamentary Center's Ghana project workshop on Committee Lessons for new Parliament in April 2004.

⁹⁷ Caprioli, M. & Boyer, M. 2001.

⁹⁸ UN. 2019.

Due to the distorted perception that gender is about biological differences as opposed to social roles, most women are expected to be members of the Gender Committee. While the committee can assume a leadership role on gender issues, gender is multi-dimensional, and women parliamentarians can identify and advance gender issues in any committee. It is more advantageous for women to be represented in the technical committees such as Public Accounts and Budget Committees (where applicable), which provide an opportunity to analyze and recommend changes to the budget in accordance with gender issues. Such committees may initially be intimidating, but working with their male counterparts and experiencing how technical committees operate can help women parliamentarians move beyond their initial hesitance.

7.4 Enhancing Effectiveness of Committees

Effective committee work entails a lot of research and keeping abreast with global issues. National newspapers are an important source of information on domestic issues, but international media (e.g. BBC World News) is a recommended source of information for international issues, such as trade issues and the World Trade Organization (WTO) discussions. Such issues affect all aspects of gender equality, which women parliamentarians are expected to be conversant with as representatives of the women in their constituencies. Furthermore, the internet provides a wealth of information. Almost every capital in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia has internet cafés and their proliferation has greatly reduced the cost of such services. Some parliaments are fortunate enough to have computers and access to the internet provided by their libraries. However, surfing the information highway can be time-consuming, and hence there is a need to know the appropriate organizations and search engines to use.

Once the relevant information is obtained, the challenge is to organize it in a way that is comprehensible and concise. In most cases, it is useful to define the problem, identify some key issues with practical examples, generate possible solutions with the possible trade-offs and then make some recommendations. Organizing information in this way provides a basis for a structured discussion and saves time. When presenting the information, it is important to always have an overview that quickly summarizes the structure of the presentation. The introduction should include some quotation or reference to something that the audience can identify with. This generates an interest, therefore, attracts and helps to maintain the attention of other members. Depending on the issue being discussed, generally, the presentation should not exceed 30 minutes because psychological studies have shown that the concentration span for most people is no more than half an hour.

Psychological studies have also indicated that people have a better recollection of what is said at the beginning and at the end of the presentation, hence the importance of retaining the audience's attention midway through the presentation with some memorable phrases or professional jokes. A summary of the presentation is essential to remind the audience of the key points and end with a question or powerful quotation.

The presentation may be the easy part, but knowledge of the issue will be proven by the ability to answer questions and comment on or clarify issues as requested by the audience. The presenter should be prepared to provide further references to assist those interested in acquiring more information. The presenter should always make him or herself available to discuss the issue further as confirmation of one's knowledge and interest in the issue. Presentation to the committee should be complemented by lobbying for support of the recommendations. Knowledge of the key decision-makers and the ability to establish good relations with them will contribute to the committee member's success.

In some countries, committee reports are published, while in others, they are kept secret. Where reports are published, it is essential for committee members to bring such information to the attention of their constituencies. Feedback to the electorate maintains the interest in governance issues and also helps to mobilize support for bills that may be introduced as a result of the committee's discussions.

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Chapter eight: Changing attitudes for gender equality

8.1 Defining Attitudes

Attitudes can generally be defined as a combination of feelings, beliefs and behaviour, and are formed, nurtured and perpetuated by the socializing institutions discussed earlier. Attitudes also form the basis of one's perception of what is right or wrong, and that distinction is acquired through observation, imitation and deliberate instruction. The way men and women relate to each other within the home and in society reflect the beliefs and behaviour they observe as children growing up and receive as instruction at school, in religious organizations or the workplace. For instance, children may learn through observation and behaviour at home that a man is the head of the household and hence is entitled to make decisions on behalf of the household. Such beliefs and behaviour extend to the workplace and relations within religious organizations. It is therefore apparent that attitudes form the basis of gender inequality and any change towards equality will need to focus on changing attitudes that society has about different groups.

8.2 How Attitudes Change?

If an attitude is comprised of three elements: feelings, beliefs and behaviour, then the change can occur at any one or all of the levels. According to psychological theory, feelings and beliefs are much easier to change than behaviour. An example of this is a conversation with a gentleman who considered himself gender-sensitive. In a bid to illustrate the difficulty in changing behaviour, even though feelings and beliefs have changed, the gentleman was asked if he would carry his wife's handbag. The response was a definitive "no" because a man cannot be seen carrying a woman's handbag. In trying to persuade the gentleman to accept that he was not as gender-sensitive as he thought he was, it was explained that a lady's handbag is so small and presents no inconvenience and the refusal to carry it was a mere function of our socialization and conditioning. By carrying a woman's handbag, nothing would biologically change and alter the man's features. The gentleman eventually accepted the challenge to carry his wife's handbag but could not visualize himself actually doing it. This exchange confirms the difficulty in changing behaviour, though feelings and beliefs can easily change.

Attitudes can change due to changing circumstances forcing people to discard old beliefs and behaviours. When abroad, men from some societies undertake domestic responsibilities because they live in a country where they cannot afford domestic help but would probably not do so in their home country as they would often have domestic assistants. Such circumstances can force changes in people's attitudes at all levels, but the change is, at times, transient and there is regression to the original attitudes once people are back in their home country. On the other hand, change could be spontaneous through observation of the positive benefits of change, therefore, permanent. An example of lasting change in the African context is the issue of educating a girl child and the benefits to the family of the girl assuming the responsibility of caring for the family. The

change in this case is at all levels: feelings, beliefs and behaviour. A cost-benefit analysis could be used as a tool for assisting people to change long-held attitudes. Changing the attitude towards educating a girl child will not only benefit the immediate family but society as a whole.

Attitudes can change as a result of acquiring new information, rendering old information redundant or obsolete.

Example: New information changing attitude

The Parliamentary Centre, in collaboration with the World Bank Institute, conducted a series of training for the Ghanaian parliamentary staff on gender awareness. During the first session, one participant commented on the notion of gender equality based on his experience while in Germany in the seventies, when women resorted to burning their bras as a sign of gender equality. It was encouraging to listen to the same participant, during the session on microfinance, comment that it was necessary to change men's attitudes so as to enable women to make decisions with respect to the utilization of microfinance as an effective strategy for reducing poverty. This is an example of a change in attitude as a result of having received new information.

A change in attitudes can also be forced on people by legislation. In the Muslim religion of Ghana, a man can have as many as four wives, but in Western countries, polygamy is prohibited. Some Muslims, who have migrated to these countries, now regard polygamy as a retrogressive practice. This is the case when old behaviour is deemed old-fashioned.

Parliamentarians are expected to exercise their oversight role on conventions such as the CEDAW that most governments have signed and ratified, but implementation is very scant on the ground. The custom or practice of using a girl child for reparations, particularly in murder cases in a number of African countries, was historically designed as a form of punishment and a deterrent when there were no law courts. However, the times have changed, so the question is – should society still maintain this custom and should it be acceptable to give up a daughter in payment for a crime committed by someone else? This example of culture came to light during the gender awareness training for the parliamentary staff in Ghana. This is an indirect way of persuading people to support gender equality without creating a sense of competition between men and women or a sense of women challenging men.



8.3 Why Change Attitudes?

The previous discussion on the budget emphasized the need for efficient allocation of resources. Gender inequality implies inefficient utilization of resources, while equality helps to attain sustainable development. Often women's participation in the development process is hampered by a lack of access to resources. Changing attitudes towards women not only benefits the individual but society as a whole by allowing women to capitalize on their strengths.

Attitudes form the basis of our culture, and culture determines who we are and distinguishes one group of people from another. By changing our attitudes, we may subsequently change our culture; the question arises: how beneficial is the change of one's culture? This is a fundamental question, which can only be answered through cost-benefit analysis. According to the African culture, the boy child is the natural heir of the family's inheritance, and hence when education resources are low, preference should be given to the boy child over the girl child, irrespective of their academic performance. Is educating a girl child beneficial or detrimental to the family or society? It is acknowledged that a higher growth rate and lower population rate is a necessary condition for sustainable development; thus, a prolonged stay in school for the girl child implies a smaller and educated family. A smaller family size reduces the potential for maternal health problems while improving the quality of life for both mother and child, thereby reducing the health cost to society. HIV/AIDS is posing a great human resource challenge for some African countries and is affecting more women than men. An educated girl child is better equipped to make informed decisions about self-protection. Mobilization of all social capital, much of which is being lost through HIV/AIDS and poor health, can contribute to greater economic development and hence a benefit to the society

8.4 Who are the Change Agents?

Parliamentarians

As representatives of the people, parliamentarians are the bridge between the electorate and the government. This unique position presents parliamentarians with an opportunity to be change agents through their representational, oversight and legislative roles. Change can be effected through the acquisition and articulation of new information by parliamentarians in the course of their representational duties. Through oversight and recommendations for change, laws can be amended and new bills introduced to bring about the desired change. As previously observed, in order to persuade people to change long-held attitudes, well-researched and persuasive information may be necessary. Parliamentarians, thus, require the services of well-trained parliamentary staff that are gender sensitized enough to identify gender issues and report on them in a manner, that assists parliamentarians in making convincing arguments for change.



The burden of changing attitudes cannot be achieved by the victims of gender inequality alone; the support of male parliamentarians is crucial since it is easier for men to be convinced about the benefits of change by other men than by women. Gender sensitivity training is, thus, important for both men and women parliamentarians. An attempt to change attitudes during an election campaign may not be pragmatic since both men and women parliamentarians will be competing for political office. It may be more advisable for parliamentarians to take advantage of the normal constituency meetings and political rallies to promote gender equality issues.

Civil Society

Parliamentarians can benefit largely from closer interaction with civil society groups that normally work at the grassroots level and are in direct contact with the people that parliamentarians represent. The role of parliamentarians is often hampered by inadequate financial resources and support staff; therefore, collaboration with civil society is crucial and can help to overcome those shortcomings. Some proposed changes may be met with resistance due to a difference in perception of the policymakers and the people. Due to their position, civil society organizations can clarify these misconceptions since they are in direct contact with people both at the grassroots level and at the level of policy development. Although not all civil society organizations enjoy the confidence of the people at the grassroots level, most are trusted and considered more knowledgeable about the people in the communities in which they operate and hence have a greater probability of changing people's attitudes.

Civil Servants

As first-line policy developers and implementers, the attitudes of civil servants can determine the success or failure of any changes proposed by the parliament. In most countries, there is often a power struggle between civil servants and parliamentarians; the latter claim to be the legitimate representative of the people, while the former has a perception of superiority, which derives from being the policy implementing arm of the government. Without interaction and understanding between parliament and the civil service, policies or laws introduced as part of the parliament's oversight role can be met with resistance from those tasked with implementing the legislation. If gender equality is to be promoted through the various roles of parliamentarians, civil servants are undoubtedly some of the first candidates for gender sensitivity training.

The budget is a crucial tool for achieving gender equality, and as illustrated in the discussion on budget cycle and process, the formulation and implementation is the responsibility of the government through civil servants. Unless parliamentarians have a mechanism for intervening during the budget formulation process, the demand for change after the process is completed and the estimates are tabled in parliament is often resisted by civil servants since it implies poor planning on their part. Even when changes are made to the budget, unless the civil servants are convinced about these changes, they might not be put into effect. Therefore, dialogue between civil servants and parliamentarians is crucial if attitude change is to be effective.

Law Enforcement Agents

Laws, on their own, are insufficient for effective change. The essence of international agreements such as the CEDAW is often enacted into law by parliament; however, discrimination against women continues. In particular, the role of law enforcement agents is an integral part of the larger struggle to achieve gender equality. For the law enforcement agents to execute their role in a manner that achieves gender equality, knowledge about gender issues is essential, and hence gender sensitivity should be part of their training.

Example: Gender insensitive enforcement of the law

Human trafficking is a problem often associated with women who are exported or imported against their will. When smuggled women are caught by authorities for entering a country without relevant documents, they are prosecuted for such a crime, although they are the victims, without the authorities investigating the circumstances surrounding the alleged crime. Gender sensitivity training can persuade law enforcement agents to investigate the human traffickers who are the real criminals and not the women.

The Media

Of all the change agents, the media is probably the most powerful and effective due to its ability to reach a wide audience through various channels. Since journalists have been born and raised in the same socializing institutions as everyone else, the media coverage of women reflects those attitudes. A gender-sensitized journalist can ensure that media coverage portrays stories involving women in a way that is not sexist.

Gender equality is central to citizenship, democracy and governance. By failing to give a voice to women, the media denies women the right to citizenship. Women parliamentarians, who often struggle to retain or increase their level of representation in parliament, cite unfair media coverage as one of the reasons for their inadequate visibility in society. Limited coverage by the media of the work undertaken by women implies that they either do unimportant work or less work. Furthermore, even if women parliamentarians are quite visible within their communities, they tend not to receive the same media coverage as men.

8.5 Measuring Results – Statistics and their Significance

The goal of changing attitudes with respect to women is ultimately achieving gender equality. An empirical evaluation of the impact of initiatives on attitudinal change is essential for deciding on the most appropriate policies. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of gender-sensitive policies is often hampered by the unavailability of statistics and an analysis of implementation successes and failures.

Statistics are raw data grouped and reported as a single number. For effective use in decision-making, statistics have to be translated into indicators, for instance, percentages and averages. Such indicators are used to analyze the impact of change which can serve as a comparison between different sexes, countries or different age groups. For instance, women's representation in the parliament is referred to as a certain percentage. An assessment of the progress towards equity in parliamentary representation for women depends on some criteria or benchmark, such as a 30% quota for women. With 61.3 percent female representation in parliament,⁹⁹ a country like Rwanda is considered progressive in terms of gender equality. It is important to understand the circumstances as well as the statistics, though. For instance, the high representation of women in Rwanda's parliament does not necessarily translate into greater gender sensitivity because the result could be a reflection of other factors, such as the genocide, which pushed women into previously male-dominated areas.

In order to determine whether or not progress is being made towards achievement of the objective, gender-disaggregated statistics are necessary. The disaggregation identifies the beneficiaries of the services and the gap. Policies are then designed to bridge the gap. For designing gender equality policies, the data has to be disaggregated by sex since policies have a different impact on men and women. Sex disaggregated statistics for Nigeria, set out below illustrates the gender disparities for a number of issues, which can be used to form better policy choices. For instance, the female literacy rate remains over 10 percentage points below the rate for men. When examining the other sex disaggregated statistics, it becomes evident that this is likely due to the lack of equality achieved in enrolment to both primary and secondary education.

Nigeria Country Statistics:¹⁰⁰

Population: 199 million; 49.2 percent female, 50.8 percent male

Representation in national parliament: 6.6 percent female, 93.4 percent male

Unemployment rate:¹⁰¹ 26.6 percent female, 20.3 percent male

Labour force participation: 48 percent female, 63 percent male

Literacy rate: 59.3 percent female, 70.9 percent male

Enrolment in primary education: 47.5 percent female, 52.5 percent male

Enrolment in secondary education: 46.7 percent female, 53.3 percent male

Distribution of HIV Patients: 53.1 percent female, 46.9 percent male

Age bracket with highest HIV prevalence:¹⁰² 3.3 percent female (35-39), 2.3 percent male (50-54)

⁹⁹ IPU. 2021.

¹⁰⁰ The following statistics are drawn from the National Bureau of Statistics "Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria" 2018 unless otherwise cited

¹⁰¹ National Bureau of Statistics. "Volume I: Unemployment and Underemployment Report". 2018.

¹⁰² Mahon, C. 2019.

The disaggregation by age can identify the age group with the greatest demand for certain services and the resources needed; for example, in the table above, the age brackets with the highest prevalence of living HIV patients are broken down between men and women. In this example, it is clear a considerable proportion of women aged 35 to 39 are living with HIV and resources and policies should be targeted, not just to women, but specifically to women in this age bracket. Women are considered the poorest of the poor, but they are not a homogenous group and disaggregation by socio-economic groups identifies the real poor women requiring specific poverty reduction policies.

While corruption in administration and the sustainability of microfinance are cited as the reasons for failure of finance to reach the real poor, the skewed proportion of beneficiaries can also be a result of the absence of statistics indicating who the real poor are. Even with availability of such statistics, the lack of disaggregated statistics would still distort the supply of microfinance due to demand among women for certain services being underestimated.

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Useful Websites

Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie

<http://apf.francophonie.org>

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

<http://www.cpahq.org>

Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC)

<http://www.gopacnetwork.org>

McGill University – School of Continuing Studies

<https://www.mcgill.ca/scs-parliament/>

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

<http://www.ipu.org>

The Parliamentary Centre

<http://www.parlcent.org>

Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)

<http://www.pgaction.org>



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