

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Empowering Women in Traditional and Conservative Societies

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INTRODUCTION

“Empowerment of women and girls is the only remedy to our prevailing male chauvinist culture”

- António Guterres

Across nations of the globe, the concept of women empowerment has progressively prevailed over the course of human history which had rendered it synonymous to the notion of gender equality which is slowly being integrated today into labor force, education, and human rights sectors in women’s favor. However, despite the undeniable escalation of these modernist movements, some countries, cultures, and civilizations adhered to their religious, traditional, political, and/or social constructs and, consequently, refuted the empowerment of women within their institutions such that their societies persist on patriarchal dominance as well as the imbalance within the social, economic, educational, political, financial...etc. sectors between genders; these countries have been predominantly identified as traditional and conservative societies.

The primary question to be raised when confronting this widely controversial matter is ‘why so many advocate for the empowerment of women?’

The answer is quite simple: According to the 5th United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality which is founded over the idea of the cruciality of women empowerment and gender equality, the following can be achieved by providing women their rights to participate and interact as part of the economic and social sectors: “build strong economies, establish more stable and just societies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights, improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities, and propel businesses’ operations and goals.”¹ Conservative and traditional societies, on the other hand, choose to overlook the prospects of women empowerment and favor their traditional and cultural virtues instead which has become an impediment to the women within these societies who seek to pursue their rights and aspirations within economic and educational or even political areas but are bounded by the parameters of male supremacy, so happens with the women who search for liberation from male oppression, gender discrimination, and violence but whose rights have not been

¹ Women’s Empowerment Principles

considered by the government to vocalize or evade this impoverishment. It is this minority of women within these types of societies which must be deliberated such that they may acquire these rights to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goal of Gender Equality and contribute heavily to the fast evolving nature of the world throughout all its aspects.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Women Empowerment can be defined as the process in which women enhance their health, economic, social, political, and financial status by increasing their capacity of practicing their rights and objectives and materializing them as a form of partaking within the community. It is vital to note that women empowerment is a mechanism of attaining gender equality.

Gender Equality “refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.”²

Conservative Society: a society that binds its individuals to its traditions and values

Most conservative societies adopt masculine hegemonic ideals in a context where women are illustrated as inferior and incapable which drives their nature that does not consist of female participation within the many areas of their societies.

Gender discrimination is the mistreatment of an individual based on identification of his/her gender.

Patriarchal Society: a male dominated society

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

To best understand the weak areas that lack gender equality and raise the need for women empowerment, we must first acknowledge the cases in which conservative societies have disregarded women’s rights and which of their values have led them to do so. By considering this, it becomes clear as to how and why these societies reject the ideology of women empowerment, which provides insight to critics, diplomats, mediators, and peace making organizations such as the United Nations as to how these societies and their mores must be approached.

Arab Countries and Muslim Majority Countries

In most Arab countries, the deeply rooted culture had been based on a male dominated ideology such that, today, these cultural norms have driven the many forms of gender discrimination to be surfaced. This culture has restricted women to a suffocating extent and has reached a point to which penalizing them has come to

² “OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming - Concepts and Definitions.”

stripping away their most fundamental human right, the right to live. For example, one of the many of these images is “honor killing” which is the execution of a woman for dishonoring her family. In many countries, such as Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country, new laws have been implemented prohibiting honor killing; however, the crime rates have not yet been seen to decrease and the man is not punished for disobeying law. Another significant factor which results with inequality is the concept of early marriages, which is highly evident in poor countries such as those in crisis as in Syria, which leads to high fertility rates and, thus, obliges young women and young girls to tolerate the responsibility and burdens of the family and withdraw their ability to participate within the economic or political peripheral. Moreover, it is these images of inferiority within the patriarchal culture which gave men authority over women to forbid them from contributing to the overall community.

Poverty Driven Countries

When a country indicates high poverty rates, the lack of education is bound to appear in high rates as well such as many African countries, India, Pakistan, and crisis infested countries such as those in the Middle East. There are two elements of the lack education which contribute manifestly to the disparity between gender education which is one of the many forms of economic and social forms of gender inequality and calls for the need of women empowerment: the first is that the lack of education of young girls will not provide them an insight on the human rights and human equality policies which maintain the mentality of their patriarchal tradition which will lower their chances of excelling beyond their given boundaries in society; the second element emerges in the form that, due to poverty, some families are financially incapable of educating the female members of their children and, due to the male dominated culture and traditions they have, they would rather educate the male child which, in turn, deprives the young girls and women of their right to education and further enforces the disparity between genders and decreases the chance for their job opportunities.

The Case of the Gypsies

Gypsies, also known as Romani society which are a nomadic society found in millions across South Eastern Europe and the United States, although not being identified as a country or nationality, still do witness high levels of gender discrimination within their cultural practice. As a very devoted and traditionally round culture, the woman’s role within the family is vital; however, it is only limited to the boundaries of the family. The very profound traditional and cultural sense within this society has made it very conservative and restricted to its norms. One of the very limitations of this society are the social pressures set on young women such as marriage at a young age especially by the parents and the relinquishment of their education at that stage in life. Girls ages 14 – 16 tend to abandon their educational duties and ambitions in order to preserve family tradition following pressure from their parents, relatives, and surrounding fellow gypsies. This society strongly upholds the patriarchal stereotypical images of women which primarily consist of raising the kids, fulfilling her husband’s

requests, and completing household chores which limits them to their home and has deprived them of their freedom as women as well as their rights to work and education.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been considered one of the most gender restricting countries amongst nations of the world. Though progress has been seen within the country, such as women's ability to drive, that which was once considered a violation of the law, we still observe far too many weak areas of gender inequality which require the empowerment of women to provide these Saudi women with their rightful needs as humans. Some of these areas include women's inability to travel or flee the country without a male guardian's permission, forced marriages or even child marriages as well as a woman's inability to choose her marriage partner without a male guardian's approval which denies her marital freedom while man can choose multiple wives to his convenience. Also, despite the Saudi Arabian law which criminalized domestic violence in 2013, the government enforces another type of domestic violence which is the control of a man over his wife and her actions and decisions which critics have considered it to be, in itself, a solicited form of domestic violence. To add, Saudi law has not facilitated divorce filed by women, and even during the process does the man have the right to affect the woman's decisions, unlike men who may divorce a woman with no need for neither documentation nor court sessions. A breach of the right to freedom of speech is also seen within the Saudi law as women activists have been detained multiple times and Human Rights Organizations have recorded sexual assaults of these women and their physical torture and abuse during their imprisonment. All in all, these can be considered a fragment of the signs of gender inequality within the Saudi culture which must be subject to a great deal of adjustment to fulfill the United Nation's Goal of gender equality as well as to ensure the safety of these oppressed Saudi women who have been silenced, abused, and mistreated and judged by the many laws and members of their government.

Iran

Also considered one of the many gender discriminating countries in the world, Iranian women are not even permitted to speak of equal rights between genders. A conservative newspaper declared "gender equality" as "unacceptable to the Islamic Republic." has led to Iran being the 141st out of 145 countries in 2015 when it comes to gender equality. According to Iranian law and with close proximity to the Saudi law, a woman is not allowed to exit the country without her husband's permission nor can she walk without her hijab or even attend a man's sports stadium. Women in Iran cannot even participate in the sports games or any form of athletic activity while men are free to embrace all these rights with no restrictions confining them as women have. By breaching these laws, severe consequences such as imprisonment, torture, and

persecution are at hand. Even on the medical scale are women not allowed to prevent pregnancy, a law established by the Iranian government in favor of the growth of the Iranian population.

Despite its vast economic capabilities, “Women in Iran are paid less than three-quarters of the salaries paid to their male compatriots, the World Bank said in a study published February 28” (2019)³. We can infer that, if women can barely endorse their human rights, they can similarly be at a minimum when it comes to their economic rights as well. Minimal steps have been taken by the President Rouhani as of 2013 despite the fact that he also vied for equal job opportunities for between genders and disapproved of discrimination.

Pakistan

Gender discrimination, domestic violence, rape, child labor as well as child marriage have been explicit factors as to why young girls in Pakistan do not attend schools. Unfortunately half of the schools in Pakistan which were bombed or attacked by armed groups were girls’ schools as well. Thus, not only does the political situation within Pakistan affect the young girl’s education, but so does the discrepancy between the genders. Another factor of this lack of education for women and young girls is the rate of poverty within Pakistan where, as mentioned previously, boys are favored over girls concerning who receives the education and the work opportunities. In this area must we shed light on the need for women empowerment and funding women’s education to revitalize the economy.

Mali

Considering the economic crisis seen in many of the African countries, Mali, like its geographical neighbors, endures high rates of poverty leading to the lack of education especially for women and girls. Women in this society, like many of the other poor societies, remain compelled to the traditions of “housewives” unlike men who take on the labor responsibility. Not only has poverty caused a lack of education of women, but also, similar to many other conservative societies, have child marriage as well as child labor prevented women and young girls to pursue their lawful rights.

United States

The United States, well known for its cultural diversity, has around one million gypsies whose women remain unattended. Though a small society, many of their women, as explained previously, have not been able to embrace their rights as women and excel due to the very cultural limitations.

³ Iran Ranks Near Bottom On World Bank Index Of Women's Equality

As one of the most modernized countries in the world, the concept of women empowerment prevails strongly within the American society through the help of many local organizations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development) which has worked on an internationally to bring on women empowerment and the very leading female figures in the many areas of the American society such as Hilary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, and Marry T. Barra as well as the influence of many American performers who support this revolutionary movement such as Angelina Jolie. Today, through USAID, daughter of president Ivanka Trump introduced the *Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative*, a program expected to secure women economically by 2025. However, despite the many movements and institutions, the United states does not exactly top the lists when it comes to gender equality and women empowerment. For example, as of 2018, women are paid 16% less than men and, when it comes to black or hispanis women, this value decreases. This has been seen also in the various economic sectors in the United states such as the technology sectors where women compromise only 30% of the labor force in major companies.

Germany

Germany is considered to have one of the largerst wage gaps in Europe and some higher levels of educations for men. However, Germany, like many of the countries that witness these adjustable circumstances, has taken into action two laws that empower women: 'the women's quota', taken in 2016 which ensures that 30% of members of a company board is occupied by women, and the 2018 law which targets the gender pay gap through transparency of wage values between genders which may urge individuals to call for legislative action. Despite Chancellor Angela Merkel's significant presents within the political division of Germany, women within that segment direly call for empowerment as well.

Norway

Ranking 2nd in terms of gender equality, preceded by Iceland and followed by Sweden, Finland, Nicaragua, Phillipines, Rwanda, and New Zealand, the Norwegian society confirms its distribution of resources, finances, opportunities, and education equally amongst members of its society regardless of gender. "Norway's 1978 Gender Equality Act aimed to increased women's representations in the public sector. The Anti-Discrimination Ombud Act prevented discrimination based on gender ethnicity, religion."⁴ The government does admit to the need of achieving further gender equality in certain areas, yet, with what it has established, through its abolishment of gender discrimination and its exclusion of stereotypes, Norway has become an image of women empowerment where both, its women and men, sustain the healthy economic environment Norway has today (GDP per capita is 81,771 USD as od 2018).

⁴ Gender Equality In Norway - Progressive Policies And Major Challenges

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of Event	Description of the Event
December 1941	During men’s absence during the second World War, women seized the opportunity to partake in the work force
October 24, 1945	United Nations Charter, in its foundational chapter, reads the “fundamental freedoms” for all individuals of the world without racial, lingual, gender, or religious distinction.
June 21, 1946	The first global intergovernmental body of the Economic and Social Council is formed and named the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to promote gender equality and empower women.
December 10, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights ascribes to every human his fundamental rights
1951	Doria Shafik demands for equal pays, political rights, and reforms to personal status law through a march into the Egyptian parliament which eventually proclaimed the women’s right to vote in Egypt in 1956
March 8, 1975	International women’s day is commemorated by the UN and 1975 is declared Women’s year
19 June-2 July 1975	The first World Conference on Women is held in Mexico where a 10 year plan for women empowerment is decreed
December 18, 1979	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is conformed by the General Assembly to protect women’s rights and obliterate discrimination against women
14 - 30 July 1980	The Second Conference on Women held in Copenhagen
15 - 26 July 1985	The Third Conference on Women held in Kenya
June 1993	The World Conference on Human Rights is held in Vienna
December 20, 1993	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women by the General assembly obstructs violence against women
September 5, 1994 — September 13, 1994	The International Conference on Population and Development recognizes the vitality of women’s rights as a major factor to realize sustainable development though the Cairo Consensus
September 4, 1995 — September 15, 1995	United Nations Fourth Conference on Women is held: “189 nations adopt a progressive blueprint for women’s empowerment” ⁵

⁵ Timeline: The UN at 70 – Gender Equality Milestones & Memorable Moments

July 17, 1998	The International Criminal Court highlights the importance of gender balance and equality
September 6, 2000 — September 8, 2000	UN Millennium Declaration: Goal 3 promotes gender equality
October 31, 2000	Historic Resolution 1325 from Security Council is passed and sheds light on the impact of war on women which drew women as means of conflict resolve
2006	The Nobel Women's Initiative to surface women's plea for equality, justice, and peace
January 30, 2007	"India deploys the first-ever all-female formed police unit in a peace operation to Liberia; and in 2014, Norwegian Major-General Kristin Lund becomes the first female force commander of a UN peacekeeping mission" ⁶
July 2, 2010	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women, is raised by the General Assembly as a body to directly target the areas which require women empowerment
September 5, 2013	Domestic Workers Convention (C189) protects women's rights within the labor force

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

1. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) elaborates on the necessity of equality between men and women as well as the equal opportunities politically, economically, etc.
2. ECOSOC Resolution 2010/29 *Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system* defines the terms of conduct of women's roles within the United Nations Organization
3. On December 20 December 1993, General Assembly issued its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in its resolution 48/104 stating the need for providing women with their proper rights to ensure human equality and security.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

⁶ Timeline: The UN at 70 – Gender Equality Milestones & Memorable Moments

After all that has been said, though there have been many attempts and resolutions that promote women empowerment and gender equality, there remain much too many areas, especially within these conservative societies whom do not comply with the efforts conducted to obtain this Sustainable Development goal. Even within the countries that advocate and endeavor to empower their women, they still witness a violation of this notion on the familial and interrelation scales.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

A prominent possible solution for the issue of the need of women empowerment within conservative societies can be a United Nations supervision system within these countries recording women's rights as well as their restricted practices and, consequently, proclaiming economic sanctions or repercussions for disapproving a vital contribution to the economy on a national scale and international one, which would be the women's labor and their political/social affiliations. Even the violation of the many resolutions and treaties mentioned above must be handled as such. In addition to this monitoring, one of the many mechanisms to combat gender discrimination and pertain gender equality is the eradication of child marriage, labor, and trafficking. These are abundant areas of harm towards women today which require profound attention and must heavily be taken into consideration when handling the topic of women empowerment.

A related solution can be raising funds for women's education within the countries that witness high rates of poverty while spreading awareness, not only to young boys but also to young girls so that they know their respectful economic and social rights. Social media devices play a significant role in spreading awareness as well. An example can be taken such as the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women which resulted in two villages with the highest rated of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in setting a halt to this harmful process as well a child marriage.

Another approach towards the topic can be mandatory labor for women in conservative societies in which they are prohibited from working. For example, such can be executed lawfully: a woman will have to file a monthly report of specified labor duration per month to an official organization or the United Nations unless certain excuses, such as child care or medical concerns are presented. This will give path for women to receive experience and income while partaking in the economic sectors progressively.

It is important to note that there is not yet, but must be, a central overarching area or platform for women to present complaints or report on gender discrimination cases or violations of women's rights from which we may know what specific areas must be evaluated and what forms gender discrimination takes on and, thus, take action to empower women.

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