

**Model United Nations of the Far West**  
**60<sup>th</sup> Session Issues Book**  
**The General Assembly**

## *Women in Power and Decision-making*

Michelle Decker, SJSU

Former Secretary General Kofi Annan once declared that, “It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race.” Whether in government, business, or their own homes, women who have participated in decision-making positions have proven to have profound impacts in the decision-making process itself as well as on the final decisions that are made. Women have the right to be active citizens; disallowing them from participating in leadership positions means excluding them from important aspects of modern life and thus excluding them from important decision-making processes that directly affect them. In many countries women are barred from actively participating in leadership positions in the public and private spheres.

Women who are bound to their households by chores, children and tradition have neither the time nor support needed to seek leadership positions within their communities. The United Nations has made recognizable progress toward gender equality for women in power and decision-making roles in the last ten years. Several UN branches and groups have attempted to empower women with zealous goals and meticulous paradigms; however, these steps toward progress have proven weak. Women are still marginalized in the higher levels of power structures by a variety of oppressors.

The promotion of equal opportunity for women to participate in decision-making processes in the public and private sectors is paramount to the creation and maintenance of accountable, transparent governments and continued development (Division for the

Advancement of Women, 1999). Discrimination against and restriction of women within power structures is not only detrimental to their well being, but to the progress of the world.

As part of the Economic and Social Council, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) works to care for and evaluate the progress of women's advancement through society. They devise policy, create, support, and monitor international agreements on gender equality and the empowerment of women. DAW worked to help form one of the most fundamental conventions in protecting women's rights; the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Signed in 1979, CEDAW includes two articles that specifically defend women's rights to participate in political and private life. Article 7 reminds states of their responsibility to secure equality among men and women in leadership positions. The concept of equality is outlined to include the right to vote, to be eligible for election, to be able to hold public positions, to perform public functions, and to take part in the formulation of policy (General Assembly, 1979). The CEDAW also has an Optional Protocol that includes a Communications Procedure and an Inquiry Procedure. The Communications Procedure gives individuals and groups the right to complain to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women about any violations of the Convention. The Inquiry Procedure enables the Committee to conduct investigations into serious or systematic abuses of women. Member states that ratify the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol must abide by the rules set forth by the convention and allow for the Committee to intervene when necessary. The Optional Protocol strengthens CEDAW giving it force and imposing consequences on member states that do not comply; but it is only optional which allows several states to choose not to accept the protocol. Many member states have accepted CEDAW with conditions, reservations, or have excluded themselves entirely from certain articles, paragraphs,

or clauses due to conflicts with national legislation or religious law. CEDAW, as it stands now, cannot reach its full potential if the global community is not united.

With CEDAW serving as a foundation, other international plans have attempted to create paradigms for the empowerment of women. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, directed by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) with the full support of DAW, the Beijing Platform for Action was created. The Beijing Platform for Action called for aggressive improvement in 12 areas of critical concern including women in power and decision-making. The Platform for Action delineated two objectives for women in power and decision-making. The Platform for Action strived to secure women's equal participation in power structures. Secondly the Platform for Action planned to increase women's knowledge and training in order to help them access the decision-making and leadership roles (Division for the Advancement of Women, 1995).

In terms of women's political participation and decision-making, the Platform for Action called upon member states and United Nations entities themselves to aggressively increase the number of women actively participating in authority positions and decision-making processes by approximately 30 % through target setting, and reform. Quotas and/or affirmative action measures were suggested. Governments were encouraged to more actively support research institutes that conduct studies on women's participation in leadership, as well as to monitor the progress of the incorporation of women into decision-making environments. Career advancement programs for women of all ages and measures promoting reconciliation of family and professional life were also suggested by the Platform for Action. The equal division of labor within the household was stressed to allow for women to have the time to pursue their academic and professional goals. These were among the many steps suggested for the advancement of

women in power and decision-making (Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005).

Unfortunately, the Platform for Action, lacked the cultural support, and the institutional strength to make a considerable impact. The Beijing Platform for Action was evaluated every five years after its inception and showed recurring complications. The progress of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was appraised at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century, Beijing Plus 5.” Both the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women defined numerous logistic and diplomatic obstacles to empowering women to take part in decision-making settings.

While some countries have successfully integrated women into higher level political offices and higher level management positions, some are still struggling to shatter the glass ceiling. While some countries have implemented Affirmative Action policies and women are indeed reaching offices and senior management positions, they have yet to reach Committee Chair offices and Chief Executive Officer positions in most countries. Traditional roles and expectations restrict women’s choices in education and career training and force them to submit to household duties. The existing difference between *du jure* and de facto equality in decision-making is clearly detrimental to the implementation of the Platform for Action. Women have been able to sustain 30% of seats in parliament as set forth by the Beijing Platform for Action in only 14 member nations. When South Africa implemented Affirmative Action policies to incorporate more women into the upper echelons of management, only one-third of male managers were committed to advancing women into their ranks and only one in eight managers supported affirmative action (Equal Opportunity, 2005). In addition to conflicting cultural norms, member states have not enforced the Beijing Platform for Action with the needed

enthusiasm to have a substantial impact. Many countries have accepted the Platform with conditions and reservations or are not implementing the plan with haste due to lack of human and financial resources. Unfortunately, the Platform for Action does not include any repercussions for non-participation for implementation.

Gender equality is the third Millennium Development Goal. This goal measures the number of governmental assembly seats that are held by women in UN member states. Extra emphasis was given to improving quota systems and finding creative ways around cultural barriers. Instead of a 30% increase in parliamentary assembly seats, the Millennium Project Gender Equality Task Force aspired to achieving a 50% increase. The task force found that the involvement of women in the governing process diminished levels of corruption in these states. The task force has focused on diminishing discrimination on the basis of marital status and family responsibilities. However, many countries lack data for these statistics and have not measured the quality of this work (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Some groups have criticized the measurements as narrow or misguided. UN authors Grown, Gupta and Khan, suggested replacing the targets for the third Millennium Development Goal with three new target categories including capability, opportunity and agency targets. The new targets would focus more heavily on the quality of progress rather than the quantity of progress. Regarding the empowerment of women in decision-making environments, Grown, Gupta and Khan suggested region-specific indicators such as gender gaps in earnings in paid and self-employment, sex-disaggregated unemployment rates, or occupational segregation. They also suggested utilizing indicators regarding the prevalence of physical violence against women as violence is detrimental to the development of women and their careers. Gender equality and the empowerment of women is

both a Millennium Development goal in itself as well as a condition necessary to reach other goals, such as sustainable development (UNDP, 2008).

In 2000 the Security Council passed resolution 1325, which required all member nations to dramatically increase the level of representation of females in national assemblies. This was focused to expand the role of women in leadership positions especially within the resolution of conflicts, peacekeeping, and peace building efforts. This resolution also marked for the first time the Security Council's recognition of the fact that conflict affects women and girls differently than men and boys. The Interagency Task Force on Women Peace and Security was created by 1325 to ensure collaboration amongst United Nations member states. The task force then promoted election observation missions to ensure fair treatment of women during voting, and within the election itself (United Nations, 2005).

The UN Development Programme has also been working to empower women and has devised the "Gender Equality Strategy 2008-2011." This strategy calls for the removal of internal barriers like religious law and gender-based violence that deters the promotion of gender equality within decision-making environments. The UNDP seeks to better educate the international community on the impacts of customary laws, faith-based justice, and informal justice mechanisms on gender equality goals and commitments. Sadly, all of these international efforts to empower women have been insufficient due to lack of commitment, cohesion and resources. Women are still under-valued in both public and private decision-making environments.

Despite the goals and efforts of these many United Nations bodies and entities, women are still under represented as authority figures in negotiation processes especially in the political arena. In the public sphere women are under represented in national governments and judiciary

bodies. While some progress has been made in the last five years, women are still suppressed through harmful traditions and the ever-present glass ceiling. However, in the last decade women have run for local and national offices, emerged as a separate electorate, and slowly started to promote women's issues as a political platform. In 2008, 18.4% of national assemblies consisted of female members; women exceeded 30% of representatives in 22 countries. Of those female members however, only 8% held presiding officer positions in 2005; this percentage fell two points in ten years (General Assembly, 2005). Specific political systems account for a large part of the obstacles inhibiting women from taking part in the political decision-making process. In particular, non-democratic countries tend to have lower levels of female political participation. In addition, proportional electoral systems engendered more female representation in national assemblies than did majority/plurality systems. In part because in proportional representation systems, more candidates can campaign for a position, whereas in majority/ plurality systems the political party must choose the candidate who is most electable in the society in which it functions. Decentralization of government has had a similar effect in expanding the number of positions available to women. To achieve gender equality governmental and electoral reforms may be needed.

Initiatives to increase the number of women in decision-making positions have been handicapped due to lack of human and financial resources for the training and preparation of women for authoritative careers. Even when elected, women lack effectiveness due to inexperience and little training before their terms. More qualitative data, microstudies and case studies are needed to determine the amount and quality of training programs when they do arise. In addition, more data on the progress of women at the lower levels of decision-making, like state and provincial offices should be compiled and disseminated on a regular bases.

To compound the problem of limited training and lack of political experience, many elected women are not viewed as equals or colleagues because they most likely would not have been elected if not for the quotas or affirmative action measures. Women are then not chosen for special committees or presiding officer positions within these governing bodies.

Equal political participations will reflect a more accurate representation of the society in the creation of policy and thus promote and strengthen democracy. However, women cannot reach positions of power and authority without a transformation in the way the civil society sees women. Cultural customs have limited women's ability to run for office and take authority. Violence against female candidates for office has been recorded around the world. Women candidates have been threatened, sabotaged, assaulted, raped, and even killed. Besides violence against female candidates, women, once in office, are not taken seriously, are ignored or subject to verbal battering. Mainstreaming cultural perspectives on gender equality is imperative to empowering women.

In the private sector women have been denied positions of power and have been underappreciated in the decision-making process. A study of female executive corporate officers found that the Fortune 500 companies have approximately 22 corporate officers each, of which women held on average only 4 positions. Of these women on executive boards less than 2% held leadership positions such as chief executive officer or the chair of the board (General Assembly, 2005). A study quoted by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) found that Fortune 500 companies with higher percentages of female corporate officers yielded higher returns than companies with lower percentages of women in managerial positions. Despite these financial incentives, few nations have implemented and enforced quotas to ensure gender equality on executive boards in the private sector. The glass ceiling—the collection of mechanisms that

prevent women from reaching the highest levels of corporate hierarchy—is still firmly in place. This sort of discrimination is harmful not only to the company, but also to women. The UN Millennium project found that access to jobs improves women’s self esteem and their bargaining abilities within their community, making them more powerful. When women are allowed to participate to their full potential in the decision-making process they will create change that will directly affect them and their families, as well as the rest of their community.

There is a price the international community pays for excluding women in leadership positions. Recent studies suggest the world would be better off if women played a larger role in the public and private sectors. Large concentrations of youth within a nation used to be a strong indicator of turbulence and violence. Male domination of a society is now emerging as a central risk factor (Kristof and WuDunn). It seems that female involvement in society and the economy weaken extremism and terrorism. Women are part of the solution to the problems we face. When women are included in decision-making they will not only be the beneficiaries of change, they will be the catalysts. Gender quality and empowering women in decision-making environments is crucial to achieving the goals of the United Nations. Women’s involvement in decision-making fosters stability within politics and development within the private sector. In order to build a successful international system of symbiotic governments that align to better the lives of their citizens we must utilize and value the contributions that women have to offer to that goal.

**Questions to consider:**

What is your country’s position on the following Conventions, their strengths and weaknesses?

- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

- Convention on the Political Rights of Women
- Convention against Discrimination in Employment
- Convention Against Discrimination in Education

What progress has your country made regarding the Beijing Platform for action?

What percentage of women members does your country have in its national governing body?

What cultural subtleties does the United Nations need to be careful of when considering this topic?

What are the major obstacles keeping women from equal opportunities?

What has your country done nationally to improve women's equality? Has it been successful?

What can the United Nations do to increase the number of women in power and decision-making roles?

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## *Sustainable Development in Africa*

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The pursuit of sustainable development within even the most industrialized of nations is a process of great complexity and of even greater importance for the hope of continued prosperity in modern society. For many nations that are not industrialized, this process faces tremendous obstacles that cause a multitude of instabilities. The African continent faces both an immense deed and imperative duty for many of the 54 countries it comprises. Economic hardship has deterred much of Africa's development contributing to widespread food shortages and hunger. The absence of healthcare has allowed the spread of preventable diseases to reduce great numbers of African populations, both crippling workforces and stifling the potential of children to contribute to their communities in the future. And even for those who do survive bouts of famine and illness, prospects of self-improvement are scant. The quality of education as well as access to it (both geographically and financially) falls far below standards common throughout the rest of the world.

The United Nations considers efforts toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in Africa to be of great priority. With respect to the MDG's, extraordinary steps have been made concerning the address of issues of public health, education, and hunger. Yet many experts speculate that unless there is further progress, the current rate of improvement will fall short of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals as proposed for 2015. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon has warned that the overall progress has been too slow to realistically meet the proposed goals. Moreover, the challenges presented by global climate change will continue to harm many nations of Sub-Saharan Africa, placing further strain on efforts toward development. Intensive efforts and innovative approaches must be taken by the

United Nations and member countries in order to achieve promises for the prosperous future of the African continent. The United Nations must continue the effort to address the systemic problems of Africa in order to create a sustainable future on the continent.

The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa experience a multitude of economic hurdles as they seek development of the private and public sectors. Chiefly, a lack of ill-functioning infrastructure prevents many nations from industrializing. Due to the problems of poor roads such as in Gabon or Botswana and insufficient access to communication as in Cape Verde or Nigeria, business and trade struggle. Access to information is much lower on average in Africa than in other regions of the world. As of 2006, in Sub-Saharan Africa there are only 1.3 Internet subscribers per 1,000 people. Other essentials for business such as electricity is absent in many places, further shrinking the incentive for new investment in Sub-Saharan Africa. More than 500 million Africans do not have access to modern energy.

Geography is also a factor. Many African nations are landlocked and positioned far from seaports or rivers where the transportation of goods can be more easily achieved. Lack of economic concern is also a factor. Depending mostly on natural resources and agriculture, much of Africa remains highly vulnerable to external disturbances. Producing the highest GDP's in Africa, South Africa's service market and Nigeria's industrialized oil sector skew continental averages. A diversification of economic output is required for much of Africa to decrease its dependence on natural resources.

Beyond the structure of economies themselves, widespread disease threatens sustainable development in Africa. Nine of the ten countries in the world with the highest child mortality rates are in Sub-Saharan Africa. More than half of the citizens of the nations of Burundi,

Comoros, Congo, and Sierra Leone are estimated to be undernourished. Among the 42 nations where these data have been collected, 12 show trends of increasing hunger from 1992. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has devastated populations of much of Sub-Saharan Africa, even as it averages the highest fertility rates in the world. Malaria alone accounts for 1 death every 30 seconds. Diseases that have been eradicated in almost all of the rest of the world kill adults as well as children. These diseases are ravaging local workforces and suppressing the potential of future leaders. Nations highly dependent upon physical labor, especially in the copper mine industry, such as Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo face the loss of tens of thousands of work-hours as hundreds of employees contract malaria. Variations of this problem cripple many other African nations in several industries, most of which are highly dependent upon healthy workers.

Most vulnerable to disease, children are also threatened by diseases that much of the rest of the world has eradicated. Young Africans will lead the fate of their nations and continent. Their perseverance is bleak even if they do survive illness, as the promise of bettering themselves through education is highly limited. The improvement of access to quality education is essential to the sustainable development of Africa. For women especially, furthering education has shown through many initiatives to be imperative in controlling fertility rates thus allowing accumulation of capital to outpace population growth. This effect of education alone is a highly significant component necessary for sustainable development in Africa. As family size decreases, the pool of resources available to offspring becomes less diluted. Education is also essential in developing future generations of African leaders. As much as outsiders can help political, economic and social matters within African nations, the contributions of educated African leaders can make is much greater. Another issue is the problem referred to as “brain

drain.” African nations have some of the highest rates of emigration of skilled workers. Thousands of educated Africans per year leave their home countries to seek opportunities elsewhere in industrialized nations. Incentives must be provided to convince educated Africans to stay in Africa and become the leaders that the continent so desperately needs

“It would be a cruel irony if, just as Africa began to succeed, its prospects were cut short by a crisis beyond its control,” Liberia’s president Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson stated. Much of the continent’s high dependence on natural resources and agriculture make it especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As global warming threatens farming and mining communities, African nations will experience further strain. Moreover, the threat of rising sea levels on coastal countries will transform the landscape, leading to forced migrations and millions more internally displaced citizens. Efforts toward development in Africa must consider changes likely to occur in highly vulnerable regions. Sub-Saharan Africa possesses the lowest adaptive capacities for climate change of most of the world.

Every two years the UN issues a biennial program plan and priority report for the period. There are several bodies of the UN that coordinate to make this biennial program, one of which is The Division for Sustainable Development. They are responsible for the subprogram on sustainable development. The subprogram outlines the exact goals for the next two years and the indicators of reaching such goals. In the most recent report for the years 2008-2009, resolution 61/6/REV.1 the top priority of sustainable development was to review key sustainable development challenges, which included, agriculture, rural development, drought, and desertification in Africa. Secondly the report stressed the need for more policy options and available information on the local, national and regional governmental levels. Lastly, it discussed the requirement of “enhanced technical, human and institutional capacities” to coordinate with

the economic transition of developing nations. These are some of the steps taken by many UN divisions to set goals, measure their progress and enact real change in the world.

Underdeveloped nations cannot do this on their own, but with a more uniform commitment from all member states the MGD goals could be attained.

African nations face many hindrances that create great difficulty in the pursuit of sustainable development. Fortunately there are many signs of hope. The majority of positive outcomes shown through efforts of the UN and cooperating entities have placed emphasis on empowering Africans rather than giving direct aid. The rise of microfinance and shared resources has been a leading contributor toward this bottom-up approach. As the UN and member nations seek to provide assistance to the African continent, the urgency for improved means of aid must be examined. Sustainable development is a process that consists of great effort at every sector of business and every branch of governance. Understanding the complexities of Africa as well as individual nations is pivotal in pursuit of this process. In doing so, the United Nations and cooperating entities can be the difference between decades of further misfortune or progress toward sustainable development in Africa.

**Questions to consider:**

What progress has your country made in contribution to the Millennium Development Goals?

Has this progress been of benefit to nations of Africa?

What history does your country have in its contribution to foreign aid and development in Africa?

How will the sustainable development of Africa affect the global economy and community?

What are the main difficulties keeping the UN from reaching the MDGs and its sustainable development goals?

What difficulties are keeping your country from reaching development goals (yes even if you are not from Africa)?

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## *High Level Event*

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The United Nations General Assembly has used the High Level Event as an emergency response mechanism and an opportunity to discuss under-publicized topics. The President of the General Assembly has the authority to call meetings at the highest level on an issue or theme that is either of special interest or concern to his or her country or is a current event that is not thoroughly addressed by another organ of the United Nations. The high level event is a tool of the General Assembly to address topics that are of importance to all countries. Usually the President of the General Assembly calls one high level meeting per year; however, they have the prerogative to call several if they so choose or the need arises.

The High Level Event usually functions as a one to four day meeting of the member states of the United Nations. Many times other United Nations organs attend as well as private, and public institutions, heads of state, and non-profit organizations. The meeting usually begins with an opening plenary session that includes addresses by the President of the General Assembly and/or the Secretary General. The meeting consists of a list of speakers and/or thematic panels with experts that advise the members of the assembly on the subject at hand. At the end of every day of discussion a meeting summary is distributed to all attendees. A High Level Meeting usually culminates in a report by the Secretary General and an official document. The official document may be a communiqué, a declaration, or a draft resolution. The official document is informative or descriptive, like a record. Unlike a resolution, however, the official document of a High Level event is not binding and does not include specific or compulsory measures for each nation to take. The meeting and the culminating document draws attention to the problem or issue with a new perspective or a new vigor.

Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, president of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session, called four high level meetings. Past high level meetings have been held on themes of pressing concern like the current global financial crisis. To this end, the most recent high level meeting was the Conference at the Highest Level on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development. The conference was held in New York in June of 2009 and focused on the impacts of the global crisis. The final document declares the crisis an optimal opportunity to focus on reforming the global financial system and taking this opportunity to produce meaningful change. The conference produced a final document which emphasized the protection of developing nations, reconstruction and restoration of trust in the global financial system, promotion of good government and the facilitation of a green and sustainable recovery (United Nations General Assembly 63<sup>rd</sup> session).

Other former High Level Events have included meetings on the Culture of Peace (November 2008), the Millennium Development Goals (September 2008), Africa's Development Needs (September 2008), and Climate Change (September 2007). The High Level Event on the Culture of Peace encouraged interreligious and intercultural dialogue (United Nations General Assembly, November 2008). In addition to evaluating the current activities to encourage intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the national, regional and international level, they also declared Sept 21<sup>st</sup> the International Day of Non-Violence. This event also served as a means of preparation for the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. In the high level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations member states and its partners pledged around \$16 billion dollars and set goals to help the world's poor and disadvantaged<sup>1</sup>. Also in September of 2008, the high level meeting on Africa's Development Needs produced a

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly ( 25 September 2008)

political declaration. In September of 2007, the High Level Meeting on Climate Change addressed the leadership challenges associated with climate change. This conference sent a strong message to the international community that the leaders of the world are ready to break with the past and try to find a new path. Over all the High level Events send a message about a pressing issue or topic that is either overlooked or so urgent that something must change for the good of the international community.

This Year, the Model United Nations of the Far West General Assembly will hold a High Level Event during the conference. Within the General Assembly, the High Level event will test the research intuition, knowledgebase, and diplomacy of each delegation. The general topic area of the high level event will not be announced until approximately two weeks before the conference allowing for the conference to most adequately simulate the United Nations General Assembly and capture current global affairs. The focused topic will be announced during committee. The President of the General Assembly will announce the theme to mark the beginning of the High Level Event.

After the event is complete discussion the body will then formulate a communiqué to the other committees. The communiqué will detail the history of the problem, the reason for the need of the high level event to address the problem, and the population who is affected by the problem. The body will also suggest, based on past actions on the topic, what suggested measures can be taken in the future to alleviate or solve the issue. The communiqué will detail what the General Assembly's goals were for the event, their discussion on the topic, and the body's goals and plan of action for the future.

At the conclusion of MUNFW 2010 the President of the General Assembly will give a speech at Closing Plenary summarizing the discussion, and communiqué and share their reflections on the issue and its progress. The chairs of the General Assembly look forward to a lively and stimulating debate.

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