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Background Guide

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I. Water Scarcity as a Threat to Human Development

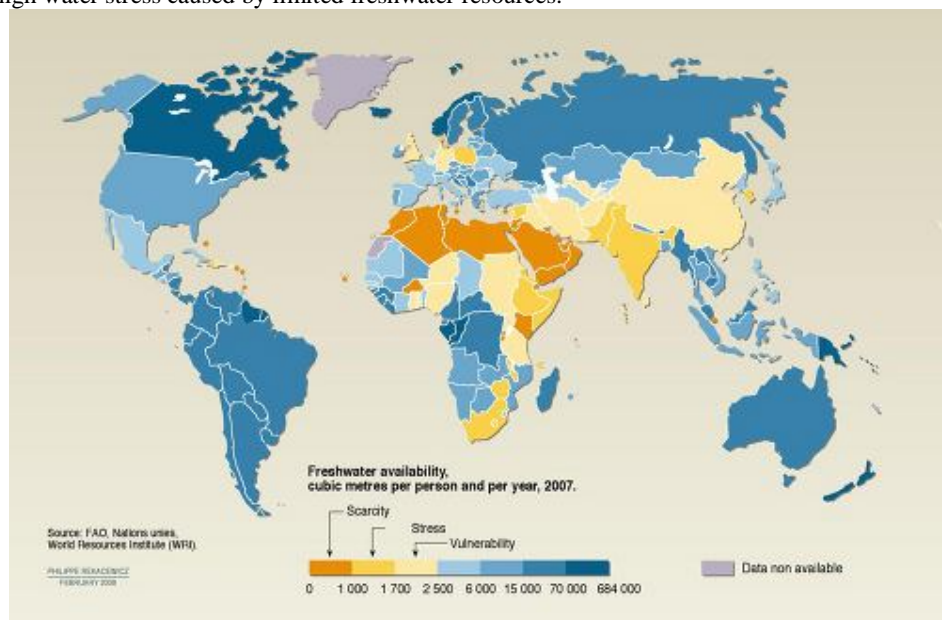
Overview

Access to sufficient, safe and affordable water is vital for human development. As key determinant of economic development and poverty, health and food provision as well as ecosystem conservation, water has become an omnipresent topic for political debates. At present more than 1.2 billion people lack access to adequate supply of drinking water and more than 2.4 billion lack access to adequate sanitation. More than 2.4 million people die annually from water related diseases due to an absence of a qualitatively safe water supply; most of them are children.¹ A growing world population and increasing industrial demands contribute to an increasingly fierce competition for water resources. Furthermore, available water resources are degraded and become unusable for food and sanitation purposes, e.g. through pollution. Last but not least, water resources are unevenly distributed. Many developing nations are particularly affected by water scarcity. In this context it needs to be recognized that water is not only a technical issue but a matter that requires political attention and priority at the highest level. Policy changes and initiatives are necessary to address water scarcity in three particular areas: water availability, lack of accessibility and water quality issues.

Challenges

Three – to some extent interrelated – sets of challenges can be distinguished, i.e. the amount of water that can be used for agricultural, industrial and sanitation purposes (availability), the distribution and the extractability of water resources (accessibility) and water pollution (quality).

Problems relating to the *availability* of water resources arise in various fields. A major set of pressures has come from land-use changes and land degradation, particularly deforestation, along watersheds. One third of the world's watersheds have lost more than 75 percent of their original forest cover and 17 rivers have lost more than 95 percent. A growing world population puts additional stress on water resources. Water scarcity can translate into food production constraints, to which countries with a high rate of population growth and strong development aspirations are particularly vulnerable. Overall, water withdrawals are even increasing more than twice as fast as population growth due to industrial and agricultural demands. Currently one-third of the world's population live in countries that experience medium to high water stress caused by limited freshwater resources.²



Source: UNEP.

In addition to availability, the use of water may be constrained by *accessibility* issues, i.e. factors that determine who can exploit available water resources for which purposes. Whether or not individuals or organizations are able to exploit a resource can depend on several factors. Water facilities or resources may be out of reach for certain individuals or groups, therefore hindering exploitation (physical accessibility). This for example includes large distances to water facilities or physical threats that keep marginalized groups from accessing water. On the other hand, exploitation may be affected by political and economic constraints or incentives (economic accessibility). Marginalized groups may be excluded from exploiting water resources through high costs. In this context, water has been increasingly promoted as a human right.³ On the other hand most countries, even those that experience water scarcity, continue to maintain regimes

¹ See Jayyousi, A. (2007), Water as a Human Right: Towards Civil Society Globalization, in: International Journal of Water Resources Development, Vol 23/2, p. 329-339.

² See Chen, S. (2008), From Community-based Management to Transboundary Watershed Governance, in: Development, Vol. 51/1, p. 83-88. Also see Jayyousi, A. (2007), Water as a Human Right: Towards Civil Society Globalization, in: International Journal of Water Resources Development, Vol 23/2, p. 329-339.

³ See GTZ (2009), The Human Right to Water and Sanitation – Translating Theory into Practice, GTZ, Eschborn.

where users may withdraw water at no costs. Dealing with scarcity, however, requires viewing it in relation to present use practices, and the choices that need to be made among the sectors and the user groups that benefit from the resource.⁴

The third dimension of water scarcity refers to water *quality*. As a result of industrial pollution and environmental degradation, freshwater quality may decrease, thus limiting the exploitation of these resources for the various purposes. Affecting sanitation and hygiene, water quality has a direct effect on health but also on food production, fisheries and biodiversity.

However, water scarcity cannot simply be expressed as the link between population density and growth, and the availability of freshwater sources, distribution or pollution. Additional factors such as climate change, competing economic demands e.g. for energy, food or industrial production, or ethnic and historical contexts increase the complexity of water-related challenges and thus contribute to multi-dimensional conflicts in many regions of the world. This includes internal as well as regional conflicts. Water scarcity in Southern Africa for example must be understood in terms of the legacies of colonial rule and global political and economic structures. In particular, colonial policies effected the dislocation of large segments of the indigenous African population onto marginal lands that are distant from water sources, the adoption of water intensive agricultural practices better suited to Europe than Southern Africa, and a segregated domestic water supply network that subsidized white households at the expense of the excluded indigenous population.⁵ Countries that are unable to cope with effects of water scarcity may decide to confront neighbours, contributing or even causing international tension around national food and energy security as well as economic development.

International action

“Even if water scarcity were strictly a natural phenomenon, its resolution would remain a politically contested subject.”⁶ Many political discourses and initiatives have emerged around water scarcity, often pulling in opposing directions and further aggravating complex water policy issues. In the past 20 years, the United Nations have attempted to establish a more coherent and better coordinated dialogue on issues related to water scarcity, often embedded in the wider context of sustainable development. At the Rio Earth Summit (1992) the growing water scarcity was addressed as a key challenge for sustainable development and with its implications for health, food security, economic development and biodiversity it became an integral part of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Agenda 21. However, the implementation of the summits international commitments with respect to environment and water was limited, often attributed to the fact that the breadth of the challenge was not matched by strengthening of governance systems, investment and political commitment. Such considerations resulted in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set specific targets in terms of poverty alleviation, health, education, water and environmental sustainability. Following the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), UN Water was established as the inter-agency mechanism to support states in their water-related efforts to achieve the MDGs and to coordinate joint programmes of UN bodies. In this context, UN Water has initiated four programmes, i.e. the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), the WHO / UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP), the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC), and the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC).

Future outlook and conclusion

Despite a range of national, regional and international initiatives, the challenge remains to operationalize the concepts and principles at the global level to get them implemented at the local level. Consequently, a range of multi-level approach is required to address the various challenges related to water scarcity, including availability and distribution, accessibility and quality of water resources. At the local and national level, efficient access and distribution systems, mechanisms to ensure adequate water quality as well as effective incentive and compensation schemes are key to establish sustainable water management policies and practices. At the regional level, governments should seek to strengthen cooperation between states and enable collaboration with non-governmental organisations and with the private sector, including the implementation of joint projects, exchange of experiences and best practices, and intensified research cooperation. In this context the second half of the ongoing International Decade for Action “Water for Life”⁷ (2005-2015), which is coordinated by UN Water, is a suitable occasion and context for initiatives that address the various links between water scarcity and human development.

⁴ Selborne, L. (2000), *The Ethics of Freshwater Use: a Survey*, UNESCO, Paris.

⁵ See Furlong, K. (2006), *Hidden theories, troubled waters: International relations, the ‘territorial trap’, and the Southern African Development Community’s transboundary waters*, in : *Political Geography*, Vol. 25/4, p. 438-458.

⁶ Loc. Cit.

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/>.

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II. Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Introduction

The on-going military conflict between Palestine and the state of Israel and in particular its implications on the civilian population in the occupied territories shall be examined so as to provide a brief description of the problem under discussion. To that effect, a brief overview over the history of the conflict shall first be provided, after which some information on the economic and social repercussions and international response to the conflict will be examined.

History

When in the late 1930s and early 1940s more and more Jewish immigrants from Germany and the countries it occupied fled to the Palestinian/Israeli territories, at that time occupied by Great Britain, ethnic conflicts between the indigenous Arab population and the immigrants broke out.⁸ The British, fighting a war on several fronts and having sustained significant military and economic losses during World War II⁹, appeared no longer able to control the continuous unrest and, in 1947, decided to hand the problem to the newly founded United Nations.¹⁰ The UN set up a special committee which in October 1947 proposed the foundation of two separate states, an Israeli one (57% of the territory) and an Arab one (43% of the territory). The subsequent resolution 181 was passed on November 29th 1947 with 33 votes in favour, 13 against and 10 abstentions. It was agreed that by the 1st of August 1948 the two states should be founded.¹¹ However, during 1948, a civil war between the Israeli and Palestinian armies was raging. When the Israelis proclaimed the state of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, only hours before the British withdrawal,¹²

⁸ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1929-1936; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1929_36.stm [06.02.10].

⁹ Smith, H. (2006), p. 136.

¹⁰ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1947; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1947.stm [06.02.10].

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly (1947), A/RES/181.

¹² BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1948; at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1948.stm [06.02.10].

“five Arab armies from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq immediately invaded Israel but were repulsed, and the Israeli army crushed pockets of resistance. [The] Armistices established Israel’s borders on the frontier of most of the earlier British Mandate Palestine. Egypt kept the Gaza Strip while Jordan annexed the area around East Jerusalem and the land now known as the West Bank. These territories made up about 25% of the total area of British Mandate Palestine.”¹³

In 1964 the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded, which, particularly since Yasser Arafat took control in 1969, turned into an armed militia inflicting heavy casualties on the Israeli army.¹⁴

The six-day war in 1967 marked a significant change in the conflict. Israel seized the Gaza strip, Golan Heights and West Bank.¹⁵ The United Nations then passed resolution 242 which requested Israel to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories according to Article 2 of the United Nations Charter. It also called for all neighbouring states to respect the integrity of the state of Israel reaffirming that any nation has the right to exist free from fear of aggression and attack.¹⁶

Israel did not return the territory to the Palestinians as requested in resolution 242, thus in 1973, Syria and Egypt started another military intervention in Israel, initially regaining some territory but eventually losing even greater strips of land to Israel.¹⁷ In resolution 338 the United Nations called on all combatants to agree to a cease fire and negotiate a lasting peace agreement for the Middle East.¹⁸

In 1977 the Herut (later Likud) party won the General Elections in Israel under Prime Minister Begin and immediately started settlement activities in the West Bank and Gaza to prevent any future compromise over these territories.¹⁹ In fact, it was Herut’s aim to establish a state as large as the biblical state of Israel. In 1979, despite these developments, a treaty was negotiated with Egypt (Camp David accords) which gave Palestinians limited autonomy.²⁰

In 1988 the Palestinian National Council voted, for the first time, to accept the 1947 peace agreement (Resolution 181) extending a peace offer to Israel. They, however, rejected the proposal on the grounds of the PLO being a terrorist group.²¹

Finally, when Premier Rabin from the Labour Party agreed to hold talks with the PLO, the secret Oslo Process in 1993 led to a historic handshake between Arafat and Rabin and culminated with the Declaration of Principles. In 1994, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) was established and Israel began withdrawing its troops from parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank as agreed in Oslo in 1993. Arafat returned triumphantly to the vacant territories and it was agreed that difficult questions such as that of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and the Israeli settlement in Palestinian territories were to be discussed within the next five years.²²

“On 24 September [1995] the so-called Oslo II agreement was signed in Taba in Egypt, and countersigned four days later in Washington.

The agreement divided the West Bank into three zones:

1. Zone A comprised 7% of the territory (the main Palestinian towns excluding Hebron and East Jerusalem) going to full Palestinian control;
2. Zone B comprised 21% of the territory under joint Israeli-Palestinian control;
3. Zone C stayed in Israeli hands. Israel was also to release Palestinian prisoners. Further handovers followed.”²³

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1964; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1964.stm [06.02.10].

¹⁵ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1967; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1967.stm [06.02.10].

¹⁶ United Nations Security Council (1967), S/RES/242.

¹⁷ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1973; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1973.stm [06.02.10].

¹⁸ United Nations Security Council (1973), S/RES/338.

¹⁹ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1977; at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1977.stm [06.02.10].

²⁰ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010), Camp David Accords; at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/Camp%20David%20Accords> [05.02.10].

²¹ Jewish Virtual Library (2010), Palestinian National Council Declaration of Independence; at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/pncdec.html> [06.02.10].

²² Palestine Facts (2010), The Oslo Process; at: http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_peace_process_outline.php [04.02.10].

²³ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1995; at:

On the 4th of November, President Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist. This assassination brought an end to the peace process. An era of political instability followed within Israel leading to the failing of the Oslo II agreement and further uprisings in the Palestinian territories.²⁴

In 2005 Israel began its blockade of Palestinian territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip), inflicting heavy limitations on the people as a result, so it was claimed, to the continued rocket attacks on Israeli territory.²⁵

In 2009 finally, Israel again occupied the Gaza strip killing more than a thousand civilian Palestinians. An enquiry into this war (Goldstone Report) found both Israel and Hamas guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.²⁶

Social and Economic Repercussions

What is commonly understood when referring to the Israeli occupied territories are those parts of the country which Israel occupied in 1967.²⁷ Particularly since Hamas evolved in 2000 continuing the armed fight against Israel which Arafat's Fatah abandoned in the 1990s Israel has imposed restrictions on the occupied territories trying to prevent attacks on their military and civilian population.²⁸

The latest blockade which started in 2007 after Hamas took over control over the Gaza Strip caused a "degradation in the living conditions of the population, caused by the erosion of livelihoods and the gradual decline in the state of infrastructure, and the quality of vital services in the areas of health, water and sanitation, and education."²⁹

The blockade includes:

- The closure of Karni, the largest and best equipped commercial crossing with the exception of a conveyor belt used for the transfer of grains.
- Sweeping restrictions on the import of industrial, agricultural and construction materials.
- The suspension of almost all exports.
- A reduction in the amounts of industrial fuel (used to operate Gaza's sole power plant), benzene, diesel and cooking gas allowed entry.
- A general ban on the movement of Palestinians through Erez, the only passenger crossing to the West Bank, except for limited numbers of "humanitarian cases".
- The closure of the Rafah Crossing, directly controlled by Egypt, except for intermittent openings.
- A significant reduction in the fishing areas and farming land accessible to Palestinians.
- Restrictions on the transfer of cash to banks in Gaza.³⁰

In the following some consequences of the blockade shall be examined:

- a. **Livelihoods:** In the occupied territories, unemployment has risen significantly to now 41.5%. This is due to the travel restrictions and ban of imports and exports. The limitation of the fishing grounds to just three miles from the shore has further lead to a severe loss of revenue and deterioration of local businesses. Israeli tanks further destroyed many of the olive farms which had been a major source of employment. As Olive trees take decades to grow, many families were forced to abandon their farms.³¹
- b. **Food Insecurity:** The above mentioned actions also led to a sharp increase in food insecurity. More than 75% of the Palestinians living in the blockaded territories are considered food insecure, which means they are lacking the basic nutrition necessary to keep them alive. In 2009, approximately 1.1 million Palestinians were receiving food aid from the WFP and the UNWRA. The latter, however, is still struggling to rebuild its structure after the fatal Israeli attack on the UN building and the UN school during the conflict at the beginning of 2009.³²
- c. **Personal Insecurity:** As a result of the blockade, the police and army in the Israeli occupied territories is chronically understaffed and no longer able to respond to emergency calls. Family violence and gang culture have increased during the blockade. Lacks of medical supplies and constant problems with the supply of electricity have caused many deaths.³³

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1995.stm [06.02.10].

²⁴ The Guardian (2009), Israel marks 14 years since Rabin assassination; at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/8782695> [05.02.10].

²⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Occupied Palestinian Territories, p. 2.

²⁶ Goldstone Report (2009); at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMGC_Report.pdf [06.02.10].

²⁷ BBC Online (2010), A History of Conflict 1967; at:

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²⁸ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010), Response to the Goldstone Report; at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/statements/2009/123er1> [05.02.10].

²⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Occupied Palestinian Territories, p. 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 7 and 10.

³² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Occupied Palestinian Territories; p. 5 and 10.

³³ Ibid., p. 11 ff.

- d. **Further Problems** occur in the areas of sanitation and water supply, the health system (which is not able to provide adequately for the population, particularly for the children injured during the Israeli offensive at the beginning of 2009), the process of rebuilding the country, women's rights, freedom of the press and the educational system.³⁴

Future Developments

So far, all attempts at solving the humanitarian situation have failed. Although the Israeli government agreed to open the borders fully and without restrictions to food aid in February 2009, nothing has happened yet. Travel restrictions are still in place and medical supplies remain scarce.³⁵ For 2009 the Palestinian territories were ranked 110th of 182 countries in the Human Development Index.³⁶ NGOs are complaining their work is deliberately hindered by the Israeli army and farmers in the Gaza strip are complaining about ad hoc decisions by the army forcing them to abandon ever greater areas of land.³⁷

All attempts to condemn the Israeli blockade have so far failed as the United States have used their veto in the Security Council. Israel is still refusing an independent enquiry into possible war crimes committed during the 2009 attack and rejects the Goldstone Report.³⁸

Delegates should therefore consider new approaches combining Israel's security interests with those of the Palestinian civilians. How can the humanitarian situation be improved under the current circumstances? What are the most pressing issues? And which incentives for Israel might be helpful in order to achieve better living conditions?

However, Delegates should be reminded that it shall not be ECOSOC's task to decide on security issues that fall under the responsibility of the Security Council.

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³⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Occupied Palestinian Territories, p. 15-24.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁶ United Nations Development Program (2009), Human Development Index 2009; at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> [05.02.10].

³⁷ UNRWA (2009), Press Release Gaza; at: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/gaza.html> [06.02.10]

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III. Towards Achieving MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Introduction: MDG 3

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) declares the desire of Member States to “reaffirm faith” in the “equal rights of men and women.”³⁹ In keeping with this founding principle, the UN has addressed the issue of gender equality in numerous conventions and declarations. Ensuring gender equality and empowering women are objectives required to combat poverty, hunger, and disease.⁴⁰ Also among the eight Millennium Development Goals, which are contained in the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* adopted at the Millennium Summit in 2000, Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women. The only target here is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary level education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

As the number of girls in school is significantly lower than the percentage of boys, gender equality is hard to achieve for women due to a lack of education. Countries with the widest gender gap have made progress in increasing the proportion of girls enrolled in school. But achieving gender equality means that women have an equal role to men in all aspects of life, from home over the economic level to political power.⁴¹ However, women’s access to paid employment has, despite progress in some regions, not seen a remarkable improvement yet, which is true especially for employment outside agriculture. The efforts of developing countries to raise the number of women in parliament has increased significantly, but women still hold only 16% of seats worldwide. There are still a lot of challenges ahead for the international community in order to achieve gender equality and empower women worldwide.

Challenges for women today

Poverty: correlation between income and gender parity

Poverty is a devastating phenomenon; the majority of the world’s population is poor, with a staggering 1.2 billion people living on less than a dollar a day.⁴² Of this number, more than 70% are women.⁴³ Statistics compiled by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demonstrate a clear correlation between a country’s average personal income and its life expectancy, literacy, and school enrollment rates, especially for women.⁴⁴ All in all, 115 million children of primary school age are denied the right for education at present; two-thirds of them being girls. Also, almost two-thirds of the world’s illiterate are women. This is not only a loss for their own lives but it also affects the economy of their country. Educated women have more economic opportunities and engage more fully in public life. They also tend to have fewer and healthier children, which are more likely to attend school. Education also increases the ability of women to protect them against HIV, and helps to break the cycle of poverty.⁴⁵

In developing countries primary school attendance of girls and boys is nearly equal in the richest households and in urban areas. However in rural areas and poor households, girls are still disadvantaged.⁴⁶ Even though there has been

³⁹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, (1945, June 26). Retrieved January 22, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>.

⁴⁰ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, (2008). Retrieved January 22, 2010 from United Nations Web site: http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf#page=18.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Seager, Joni, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, (2003), p.66.

⁴³ Women and Work Policy Working Group, *Women and precarious employment: A framework for policy recommendations*, (2005, February 3). Retrieved January 25, 2010 from Oxfam Canada Web site: <http://www.oxfam.ca/news-and-publications/publications-and-reports/women-and-precarious-employment-a-framework-for-policy-recommendations-2005>.

⁴⁴ The World Bank. *Data and Statistics*, (2007, April 1). Retrieved January 23, 2010 from: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/table1_5.pdf.

⁴⁵ United Nations Population Fund, *Gender Equality Fact Sheet*, (2005). Retrieved January 23, 2010 from UNFPA Web site: http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_gender.htm.

⁴⁶ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, (2008).

some success, especially in school enrolment at the primary level, gender disparities are still evident in some regions. Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and Western Asia have the largest gender gaps in primary enrolment.⁴⁷ However, all countries that failed to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment by the target year of 2005 should make a renewed effort to do so as soon as possible.⁴⁸ Some steps that might help to improve the situation could be to hire more female teachers as role models, to promote girl's school attendance better, to ensure the safe transportation for girls to and from school, and to provide separate school sanitation facilities for girls and boys.⁴⁹ Other important factors that can help to encourage girls to stay in school are eliminating school fees, providing school meals, and ensuring a safe school environment.⁵⁰

Empowering women in the working world

The United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, adopted in 1979, stresses in particular the elimination of discrimination against women in the workplace as comprised of the right to the same employment opportunities, the right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion and job security and the right to equal remuneration.⁵¹ The Convention also provides the basis for realizing equality between men and women in participation of political and public life by supporting their right to vote and to be elected, as well as their equal access to education and health services. All countries that have ratified the Convention agreed to take appropriate measures in order to guarantee women's rights and put the treaty's obligations into practice.⁵² While these and other UN documents have good intentions in terms of shrinking the various types of gaps between men and women, one can say that these intentions are still far from being realized. Women often have less access than men to education and vocational training, which limits their opportunities for employment.⁵³ Through globalization, the situation of women's obtainment of employment lags that of men even more. In the year 2000, at its Special Session on the *Five Year Review of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, the United Nations General Assembly pointed to several issues that needed to be further addressed.⁵⁴

Even though job opportunities and employment for women have improved in the last years, still about two-thirds of women in the developing world work in the informal economy or as unpaid family workers. Informal employment is often characterized by undefined workplaces, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, low or irregular incomes, and long working hours.⁵⁵ In Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, this type of work accounts for more than 80 percent of all jobs for women. They are also disproportionately represented in part-time and seasonal jobs and therefore deprived of job security and benefits.⁵⁶ Women are also less likely than men to own a business that employs others. Improved support for women's self-employment, and rights to land are key steps towards the success in a countries' economic development.⁵⁷ Therefore some countries have devised incentives to increase female participation in labor force. The Democratic Republic of the Congo for example has programs in place to support female entrepreneurs. Similar programs to support female business owners have been instituted by Bangladesh, Ghana, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, and Uganda. However there are still countries where women face serious obstacles in their wish to work. In the Arab world, traditional laws in society generally prevent women from taking any type of ownership, and in some cases from being able to exit the home without the accompaniment of a male member of the household. Therefore it is important to draw attention to the female role in society and promote the participation of women in all aspects of public life and decision-making. In countries where the political participation of women is limited, women are more likely to have limited economic opportunities as well. Thus, promoting the participation of women in politics and governments can help improve gender equality in employment. At present, women constitute less than 10 percent of the members of parliament in one third of all countries.⁵⁸ However, in this field a lot of progress has already been made. By the end of 2004, 81 countries had implemented measures to ensure that more women are represented in politics. Awareness campaigns, training and reforms of political parties have proved effective in increasing women's participation as leaders and voters.

Violence against women

⁴⁷ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals. End Poverty 2015*. Retrieved January 23, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>.

⁴⁸ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, (2008).

⁴⁹ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals. End Poverty 2015*.

⁵⁰ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, (2008).

⁵¹ United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. (1979, October 13). Retrieved January 23, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

⁵² United Nations, *Division for the Advancement of Women*. Retrieved January 23, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

⁵³ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Innovation at Work: National Strategies to Achieve Gender Equality in Employment Opportunities*, (2006, July 5). Retrieved January 24, 2010 from ECOSOC Web site: <http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2006/docs/RT%204%20-%20Issues%20note%20FINAL-rev.pdf>.

⁵⁴ United Nations, General Assembly Special Session (23rd), *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century*. Retrieved January 22, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm>.

⁵⁵ United Nations, *Task Force 3 Interim Report on Gender Equality*, (2004, February 1). Retrieved January 23, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/tf3genderinterim.pdf>.

⁵⁶ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, (2008).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Violence against women is still a very important issue to address as there is by far not enough attention on this topic yet. Among the many different types of violence against women, two of the most important ones are intimate partner violence and non-intimate sexual violence, both including rape, physical violence, and psychological abuse. Especially in conflict situations, women are at increased risk. Most of the violence experienced by women is perpetrated by someone they know – most often, their husband or partner. A review of nearly 50 surveys from around the world found out that between 10 and 50 percent of women were somehow abused by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. However, a significant number of incidences were perpetrated by strangers, as well as authority figures such as policemen, or combatants during armed conflict.⁵⁹ South Africa has one of the highest reported rape rate, with a woman being raped every 90 seconds.⁶⁰

Girls are among the most vulnerable members of any population, and as such the world community has increasingly paid special attention to the issue of eliminating discrimination and violence against the girl child.⁶¹ Both the 1990 *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children*, resulting from the 1990 World Summit for Children, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, resulting in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action called attention to the situation of the girl child. Concerning the protection and enhancement of specific rights, some key areas have been identified: early and/or forced marriage, genital mutilation, protection of basic rights in conflict and post-conflict situations, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on girls.⁶²

Previous goals and targets, including financial commitments that were made with regard to the girl child remained unfulfilled. The empowerment of girls is one of the key points to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence. However, it requires the active support and engagement of their families, boys and men, as well as the wider community. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is a global effort and an essential element in improving the situation of the girl child and ensuring their human rights. Up to now, the girl child does not receive sufficient attention in policy and programme development.⁶³

United Nations and international approach

The United Nations regard gender equality and the empowerment of women as key issues in order to achieve all Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, there have been many Declarations, Conventions, and Summits concerning these matters. Among the most important ones is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), from 1979, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) (A/52/231), which was published in 1995. The Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2), made in 2000 was also an important step along the line as it targets the reduction of gender disparities in education.⁶⁴ In the same year as the Millennium Summit and Declaration, the Security Council adopted a resolution (S/RES/1325) embracing the interactions between women's empowerment, gender equality and the peace and security agenda. This was a critically important step on which the global community can build increasingly vigorous standards.⁶⁵

In June 2000, the General Assembly also held a special session on “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century” and adopted an outcome document entitled “further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”. A number of intergovernmental processes since June 2000 offer further guidelines such as the substantive session of ECOSOC in 2000 and the 55th session of the General Assembly.⁶⁶

Another important paper is the Gender Equality Strategy (GES) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which is based on the idea that gender equality is an irreducible condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development, and is as such articulated in the updated UNDP Strategic Plan 2008-11 (SP).⁶⁷

The most important role in analyzing the achievements towards MDG 3 is the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. It has been assigned to take a systematic look at the means to achieve significant improvements in gender equality and the empowerment of women, especially in the developing world. The interim report of the Task Force deals with the priorities that should be taken by states, governments, and NGOs. The report points out that in the last 30 years women have made some gains, especially in health and education. However, it remains obvious that the first deadline for the MDG target of goal 3 will be missed, namely to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary level education. This strong focus on education is justified by the evidence that investing in girl's education will help the overall situation. It is also clear though, that education alone is not sufficient to eliminate gender inequality. Other important factors are the participation in decision-making in the political arena, as well as decent employment, and the elimination of violence against women. Therefore the Task Force has suggested

⁵⁹ World Health Organization, *Addressing violence against women and achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, (2005). Retrieved January 24, 2010 from WHO Web site: <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSep05.pdf>.

⁶⁰ United Nations, *Task Force 3 Interim Report on Gender Equality*, (2004, February 1).

⁶¹ United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women, *Report on the 51st Session (E/CN.6/2007/9)*, (2007). Retrieved January 25, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/OfficialDocuments.html>.

⁶² United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women, *Report on the 51st Session (E/CN.6/2007/9)*, (2007).

⁶³ United Nations, *Commission on the Status of Women, 51st Session*. Retrieved January 23, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm>.

⁶⁴ United Nations, General Assembly Special Session(23rd), *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century*.

⁶⁵ Women Watch, Information and Resources on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. Retrieved January 24, 2010 from United Nations Web site: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/undp_10589.htm.

⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly Special Session(23rd), *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century*.

⁶⁷ Women Watch, Information and Resources on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.

additional targets for Goal 3, such as to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services through the primary health care system; to achieve a 30 percent share of seats for women in national parliaments or to reduce the lifetime prevalence of violence against women by half.⁶⁸

Case Studies

Saudi Arabia is an example of a country in which women face challenges in the field of employment as a result of a national tradition of gender-based discrimination, resulting from both cultural factors and government policies. In recent years, the government has reversed some of these discriminatory policies and instituted new policies that promote educational and employment opportunities for women and girls.⁶⁹

The Saudi government recently announced a national education program for girls, and the Ministry of Education claimed oversight of girls' education. While just as many females graduate from college as men, they have limited job opportunities, and make up just 5 percent of the private work force.⁷⁰ Additionally, they still face both legal and traditional restrictions on the types of employment they may pursue. Most women work as teachers but there are a growing number of doctors, journalists, and television presenters. However, the problem is not only minimal work opportunities, but also logistics. Saudi women are not allowed to drive cars, and cannot travel, marry, or get identification papers without the permission of a male guardian.⁷¹ Women are educated separately from men, even at the university level, where a lack of programs in certain fields significantly restricts women's access to employment in those fields. In some cases, women are not permitted to conduct business transactions without the intervention of male agents, further limiting their employment opportunities and ability to earn a living.⁷² In early 2005, the Ministry of Labor instituted an employment campaign with the goal of adding 200,000 female workers to the labor force within six months. The government identified certain jobs to open to women and created training programs for these jobs.⁷³ Saudi authorities have also just approved the establishment of an all-women industrial city that will host training centers and employ approximately 10,000 women at more than 80 factories.⁷⁴

The Government of Rwanda has made gender parity in the legislature a top priority of the country. Therefore the constitution, adopted in 2003, guarantees a minimum of 30 percent of female representatives in parliament. The same applies to other leadership positions at all decision-making levels.⁷⁵ Rwanda currently has the highest proportion of women parliamentarians in the world, with women constituting nearly 50 percent in the Lower Chamber of Parliament and about 35 percent in the Upper Chamber. In the Government Cabinet, 36 percent of the positions are occupied by women. In Rwanda, the gender gap in primary education reached its goal of zero in 2005, and the gender gap in literacy is close to zero. Algeria is another country where parity between sexes has been achieved at the primary school level, and where the proportion of girls exceeds the proportion of boys at the secondary and higher education levels.⁷⁶

With a per capita income of \$1,600 dollars per year and 36% of its population living below the poverty line, Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries.⁷⁷ Therefore the Grameen Bank has distributed millions of dollars in microcredit loans to women in Bangladesh since the 1970s. Women in Bangladesh live under the traditional rule of the men in their lives, be they husbands or fathers, and therefore are at a distinct disadvantage when attempting to gain economic and social independence.⁷⁸ Today, the Grameen Bank delivers microcredit loans to 2.4 million Bangladeshis, 95% of whom are women.⁷⁹ Since the 1970s, poverty levels in Bangladesh have not dramatically changed, but the intensity of poverty has declined and average household income has increased by 29%.⁸⁰ Furthermore, over the past three decades, the number of women employed in banks, schools, and other service sectors has grown steadily.⁸¹ Microcredit programs have also been established in several Central American countries and play a crucial role in the empowerment of women. In Burkina Faso for example, UN Volunteers assist women who gained access to microloans in starting their own businesses. The volunteers help women manage their capital and teach them cost benefit analysis in order to improve their efficiency. These projects often result in a 50% increase in the women's income. According to the United Nations

⁶⁸ United Nations, *Task Force 3 Interim Report on Gender Equality*, (2004, February 1).

⁶⁹ Ambah, Faiza Saleh, *In Rare Public Dialogue, Saudi Women Talk Rights*, in: Christian Science Monitor, (2004, June 14). Retrieved January 27, 2010 from: <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/218/46422.html>.

⁷⁰ Ambah, *In Rare Public Dialogue, Saudi Women Talk Rights*, (2004, June 14).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Saudi Arabia: Women Face Unemployment and Complex Choices*, in: WIN News (2003), (46)1.

⁷³ Akeel, Maha. *Labor Ministry Launches Huge Initiative to Employ as Many as 200,000 Women*, (2005, January 27). Retrieved January 26, 2010 from: <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/newsletter2005/saudi-relations-interest-01-27.html>.

⁷⁴ Ambah, *In Rare Public Dialogue, Saudi Women Talk Rights*, (2004, June 14).

⁷⁵ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2007*, (2007, November). Retrieved January 27, 2010 from UNDP Web site: <http://www.undp.org/rw/MDGsREPORT2007.pdf>.

⁷⁶ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Fact Sheet*, (2008, September 25). Retrieved January 24, 2010 from United Nations Web site: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/pdf/newsroom/Goal%203%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book. Bangladesh*, (2010). Retrieved January 27, 2010 from CIA Web site:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>.

⁷⁸ Hossain, Farhad, *Small Loans, Big Claims*, in: Foreign Policy, (2002), p. 79-82.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Kay, Thelma, *Empowering Women through Self-Help Microcredit Programmes*, (2002/03). Retrieved January 27, 2010 from UNESCAP Web site: <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/publications/bulletin2002/ch6.pdf>.

⁸¹ Hossain, *Small Loans, Big Claims*, in: Foreign Policy, (2002), p. 79-82.

Populations Fund, a number of studies show that higher income does not only mean the empowerment of women in terms of basic needs, but it has a direct and positive impact on the education and nutritional status of their children.⁸²

Conclusion

There has been a lot of progress in the field of gender equality such as the increase of primary school attendance in many countries. Still the achievement of the target of MDG 3 by 2005 was missed. Especially in the secondary education the gender gap is still evident. Girls from poor and rural households have most difficulties to gain proper education. Also in the job market, women still face barriers, often based on traditional stances. They still often do their work unpaid in home or family businesses. Also when it comes to violence against women, there's still need for action. Governments should draw more attention to these topics and find legal frameworks to improve the situation.

The delegates should consider what, if any, measures their state has been taken to achieve gender equality and if this measures have been successful. What special issues must be considered when addressing the problem of gender equality in the least developed countries? How can NGOs assist in this matter and what action can or must be taken by the international community in order to achieve gender equality? How can ECOSOC most effectively promote and advance gender equality? In what ways can developed countries formulate laws that will encourage the fair treatment of women entrepreneurs and employees in the workplace?

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⁸² World Federation of United Nations Associations, *Overview on Microcredits*. Retrieved January 27, 2010 from WFUNA Web site: <http://www.wfuna.org/site/c.rv1YIcN1JwE/b.5258123/>.

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