United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Chair Report

[Agenda A: Protection of Women's Rights from Gender-Based Violence in Conflict Zones]

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About the United Nations

The United Nations is the largest intergovernmental organisation that was founded in 1945 after World War II. Consisting of 193 member states, the United Nations endeavours to sustain international peace, security and cooperation, guided by the United Nations Charter.

A replacement for the League of Nations, the United Nations has been the centre of discussion and euphony for multilateral issues such as general disarmament, international security, multilateral cooperation, international economy, human rights affairs and sustainable development. The United Nations is operated under six major organs - The Secretariat, General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice. The United Nations has also assigned other specialised agencies and rapporteurs in reach for international peace and security.

Sessions of committees pertaining to the United Nations carry arduous responsibilities of perpetuating peace and humanitarian rights. Delegates of member states thrive to represent their designated nation and to form an international consensus on a myriad of agendas.

Committee Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an international organization established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Res. 11 (II) in June 1946. CSW is recognized as the first United Nations (UN) body dedicated to women's rights, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls worldwide. It consists of one representative from each of the 45 Member States elected by the ECOSOC every 4 years. Since 1946, CSW has maintained continuity between conferences that ultimately contributed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) as well as SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Each March, CSW holds two-week sessions at UN headquarters in New York to negotiate and adopt policies and Agreed Conclusions. And in order to not lose track, the official process continuously incorporates follow-up on previous sessions. Furthermore, all of the Agreed Conclusions are transmitted to ECOSOC for further review and implementation tracking.

In practice, CSW collaborates with various stakeholders like governments, UN agencies, civil society, and the private sector. With joint efforts, it aims to achieve gender equality especially during moments of crisis like wars, pandemics, or climate disasters. For example, during the post COVID-19 pandemic recovery, CSW aimed to increase long-term recovery capacity for women, so that they can get back to their workplace just like men.

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CSW69 renewed commitments to accelerate gender equality in every corner of the world and empower women and girls. The future goal of CSW takes into account accelerated implementation and legal accountability, connecting efforts with enforceable actions. Considering the outcomes of CSW69, the next sessions will prioritize eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls through survivor-centered approaches. Along with it, CSW recognizes that true empowerment also depends on technological and educational reformation. Hence, CSW72 aims to address gender-based digital divide, promote women's participation in STEM and AI fields, and ensure safe use of technology. Finally, in line with CSW73's peace agenda, CSW highlights the urgency of protecting women and girls in conflict areas. More specifically, it seeks to release women and girls from hostage situations, support rehabilitation, and implement the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda more actively.

Agenda Introduction

Instability in militarized conflict zones often intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities. Accordingly, this agenda addresses the persistence of gender-based violence (GBV) in such areas. The issue affects conflict-affected regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South Asia. According to the UN Secretary-General's 2024 report on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), cases of CRSV have reached alarming levels with the increased displacement and militarization. The primary victims of GBV in conflict regions are women and girls, refugees, internally displaced persons, and racial minorities. The Agenda A specifically focuses on how women and girls are affected in conflict zones.

Historically, GBV has thrived under patriarchal power structures that normalize male dominance and silence victims. For instance, according to the report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), sexual violence like rape was used to humiliate entire ethnic groups, following patriarchal military hierarchies that treated women's bodies as extensions of community honor. Even today, in some regions, sexual violence becomes socially tolerated and justified. Very often, structural discrimination gets intensified in conflict zones, as societal instability weakens institutions with strong militarization: a justification of impunity. To make matters worse, the crisis has a persistent spiral pattern because the survivors encounter additional barriers after SGBV, like stigma and fear of retaliation. Hence, CSW concerns that our current society lacks gender-sensitive justice systems that can overcome barriers. According to the Gender Data Outlook 2024 published by the UN Women, "there is a lack of institutionalization for the collection of sex-disaggregated data", which leaves gaps in legal and structural accountability.

SGBV in conflict zones hasn't been merely incidental, but rather a product and weapon of war. Armed groups often use sexual violence to terrorize populations, displace communities, and claim dominance. Therefore, a single humanitarian aid is not sufficient for protecting every woman and girl. Instead, CSW repeatedly calls for an active legal and structural prevention to counteract such calculated attempts in CSW69 and in coordination with UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Ultimately, the agenda mandates long-term empowerment in the fields like human rights, justice, health and psychosocial support, education, and sustainable peacebuilding.

Key Terms

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is often defined as any unfavorable act that is directed at an individual based on their gender, leading to life-threatening consequences such as sexual, physical, mental, or economic harm. While both genders can fall victim to violence solely because of their sex or gender, it is mostly women and girls who are more prone to such brutality. This is because they live within systems shaped by patriarchal power dynamics: while male dominance is normalized, female autonomy is constrained. In times of turmoil, GBV gets intensified as the legal institutions often collapse, allowing militarized perpetrators to act with impunity. Within the agenda, GBV will incorporate any forms of CRSV, harassment, abduction, domestic violence, exploitation and abuse by armed actors, trafficking, forced recruitment, and structural violence.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Services

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services refer to a provision of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene services. When women and girls in conflict zones lack access to these services, they are highly prone to health and safety, because it is mostly women and girls who have to walk long distances to collect water or undergo a menstrual cycle. Hence, strengthening WASH infrastructure is fundamentally essential to prevent gender inequality and vulnerability among women and girls in conflict zones.

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice refers to any judicial and non-judicial measures designed to address human rights violations committed during conflict. In essence, transitional justice coalesces the idea of transition and justice. It takes into account the question: how can justice be achieved when a society transitions from human rights violation to a peaceful system of governance? To answer, transitional justice not only punishes perpetrators but also acknowledges survivors' suffering, which rebuilds public trust in legal systems. Examples include judicial trials, truth-seeking the past human rights violations, reparation for victims, and institutional reforms.

Security Sector Reform (SSR)

SSR is about reconstructing a country's security (military, police, and judicial) institutions to make them more transparent, accountable, and gender-sensitive. Historically, the peace operations in the 1990s revealed how the institutions are extremely male-centered and inexperienced, which perpetuated GBV in conflict zones. Since the actors mentioned above are directly related to the vulnerable civilians during and after conflict, their behavior instantly determines whether women and girls are at risk or safe. Hence, SSR is responsible for vetting any individuals or groups who were involved in human rights violations. Moreover, not only does it eliminate any forms of injustice, it trains gender-sensitivity across all levels of command.

Grassroots Movements

Grassroots movements are initiatives led and organized by the local community members, and in this agenda, they should be composed mostly of women survivors. Therefore, they take the bottom-structure that stems from the victim's daily realities, not like a top-down policy implemented by national governments or international donors. When grassroots movements are strong, it indicates that international support for women and girls in conflict zones can create tangible local impact without being influenced by corrupt governments or restrictive authorities. Strong civic networks give direct channels for aid and implementation.

Survivor-Centered Approach

A survivor-centered approach is defined as an approach that prioritizes the rights and needs of each survivor during the process of recovery of any harm. The approach was institutionalized through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467 (UNSCR) in 2019 and reaffirmed in CSW68 Agreed Conclusions, correcting earlier legal and structural systems that retraumatized survivors. Without an appropriate survivor-centered approach, including hasty and untrained interventions, survivors can experience dual trauma. For instance, when the testimonies are conducted by state authorities or militarized NGOs, survivors' shame gets reinforced. The appropriate survivor-centered approach can alleviate such experiences, further enhancing survivors' participation in decision-making processes, rather than merely citing in reports.

Historical Background

It is observed that international recognition of gender equality was not instant, but was brought about gradually in the mid-20th century. Historically, war has been narrated and documented through male-dominated perspectives: men being recorded as the leaders and heroes of the victory. On the other hand, women's stories or documents were put as side stories. As a result, when women suffered from GBV, their experiences were often marginalised. While their stories were frequently neglected, evidence showed that GBV was used as a tool for the shared benefit. The Second World War revealed how sexual slavery could be systematically organised under military command. One of the most striking examples is the "Comfort Women" established by Imperial Japan in Korea between 1932 and 1945. Women and girls were forcibly recruited into serving as sexual slaves for the Japanese army, being called "Comfort Women" for men. To make matters worse, this was not a random felony by soldiers, but a meticulously calculated system of control established by the state. The term "Comfort Women" itself seems to be a euphemism that covers how serious the crime was. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls' bodies were treated like tools for maintaining military discipline and morale. Similarly, there were instances where ethnic minorities were subjected not only to sexual violence but as human experimentation. Under the Nazi regime, Jewish and many other disabled women were forcibly subjected to sterilisation and medical experiments, which were aimed at "purifying" racial groups. For instance, according to a memoir written by Vivien Spitz, an American court reporter at the Nuremberg Trials after WWII, an experiment included "removal of sections of bone, muscle, and nerves", "artificial wounding and exposure to mustard gas", and "collection of skeletons from 112 live Jewish inmates who were killed and defleshed". Moreover, women in concentration camps like Ravensbrück were systematically raped by Nazi officers or exploited in pseudo-scientific procedures, attempting to erase reproductive capacity.

After the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, the body undertook institutional changes aimed at securing the rights of women and girls. Among the notable repercussions was the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1946. However, even after some years, such brutal, gender-based crimes were rarely acknowledged in international law. For instance, the Nuremberg Trials condemned crimes against humanity, but they failed to address

sexual violence against women. This reflects the ongoing perception that such crimes were trivial compared to other significant events. It was only after the Balkan Wars (1990s) and the Rwandan Genocide (1994) that the international organisations acknowledged how GBV was used deliberately as weapon of war. Later, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action designated the "Women and Armed Conflict" chapter as one of the 12 areas of concern. The platform urged protection for women from conflict-based violence, involving them in post-conflict recovery and peace negotiations.

In the 21st century, the global community has achieved considerable success in protecting some rights of women and girls in conflict areas. Starting with the broad example, the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 created the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, which has further been strengthened through resolutions. Moreover, there has been some realistic progress in which inclusive practices have brought about real change. In Liberia, for example, women's peace movements that were mostly headed by Lymah Gbowee and the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace were key in bringing the Second Liberian Civil War to a close and achieving women's inclusion in the transitional government. This campaign was later cited as a template on how grassroots movements can improve international policy frameworks like UNSCR 1325. Likewise, in Colombia, women's organisations have efficiently campaigned for gender articles in the 2016 Peace Agreement, achieving acknowledgement of GBV as well as women's inclusion in post-conflict implementation.

Even with these new developments, the challenges remain in our society. Even though many international organisations seek to provide financial and structural assistance to conflict zones, the effectiveness remains vague. The prevention of GBV in conflict zones seems an urgent issue, considering the recent examples of Gaza, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Moreover, non-state armed actors like insurgent groups or terrorist organisations like ISIS also play a significant role in perpetuating GBV in conflict zones. Hence, the agenda should seek an effective way to prevent such illegal acts, enhance legal accountability, and take a survivor-centred approach.

Status Quo

In the status quo, the lack of protection measures for women in conflict zones creates barriers for external support. To put this into numbers, in Gaza, over 10,000 women have been killed in the conflict, 37 maternal deaths each day, and some 3,000+ women requiring external financial assistance for shelter, food, and security following the death of their male counterpart.

GBV as a Weapon of War

GBV is continuously used and is evolving as a warfare method in areas like the DRC, Sudan, and Syria. Specifically, the case of ISIS (Islamic State) in Iraq and Syria shows how the non-state armed groups or terror organizations can contribute to SGBV that expands beyond traditional warfare. Unlike conventional state militaries, these groups often operate without accountability structures, making violence against women an explicit part of their ideology and strategies. ISIS systematically uses sexual slavery, forced marriage, and trafficking as strategies of terror. Hence, more than a thousand Yazidi women and girls were sexually assaulted. The strategy frequently reinforces patriarchal power within the group and erases the symbolic identity of targeted groups. Another example is Boko Haram in Nigeria, which has abducted more than 1,000 girls since 2014 to use them for forced marriage and religious conversion. Similarly, in Myanmar, various armed forces and insurgent groups have exploited sexual violence as a weapon to terrorize ethnic minorities like the Rohingya. These recent, ongoing examples signify that modern GBV is no longer confined to the states but has evolved with extremism, terror, and organized crime.

Lack of WASH services

In many fragile and conflict zones, women and girls are primarily responsible for collecting water. According to the UNICEF and WHO report, 7 out of 10 households bear this task without water on-site. When water resources are distant and unsafe, they must travel long distances, which exposes them to GBV. In a wider perspective, they lose valuable time for quality education and work, perpetuating gender inequality and poverty. Lack of WASH services also pertains to the absence of safe toilets and menstrual hygiene facilities, compromising women’s privacy and dignity. In conflict zones, women are forced to use unsafe materials that

lead to infections like urinary tract infections (UTIs): urethritis and cystitis. And these infections are extremely difficult to treat as medical services collapse.

Lack of Legal Accountability

To identify the problem of CEDAW, although it is not a convention that does not specifically pertains to gender issues in conflict zones, CEDAW General recommendation No.19 states that "GBV is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men". Hence, CEDAW defines and identifies GBV as a problem and aims to tackle it. However, CEDAW, in general terms, lacks authority and enforcement. First, while CEDAW encourages all nations to ratify and abide by the clauses, countries can "select" clauses to utilize. Essentially, a country can be a ratifier but also disregard clauses based on taste.

Second, the Geneva Conventions also contain problems. Currently, countries in conflict form a certain trend. Without proper methods of penalization, the Geneva Convention fails to hold countries accountable for their actions. Looking at the case of Russia, despite the coalesced effort of countries to stop the brutal violence in Ukraine, the effect of actions has been neutralized in many cases. When the Geneva Convention is broken, there are multiple methods of punishment. One is for the domestic government to penalize actors for their actions. This process normally occurs after the end of warfare, hence ineffective against ongoing conflicts. This results in continuous GBV during conflicts. Another method of punishment is the intervention and mediation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, the rulings of the ICC have been proven to be elusive. ICC's rulings rely heavily on the cooperation of its member states. Countries cannot be held accountable if they are not a member, as is the case of the US, Russia, China, and India. The absence of major superpowers amidst conflicts surrounding such countries reduces the authority of the ICC. When a whole state is involved in a crime, as is for most conflicts, the prosecution of the state as a whole is nearly impossible due to the lack of cooperation. Furthermore, the states in conflict or under the control of de facto governments, non-state actors, and terrorist associations are not under the jurisdiction of the ICC. In simple terms, the ICC cannot punish countries without their cooperation, and cannot penalize non-state actors, meaning the authority of the Geneva Convention, the ICC, and the UN is severely limited against gender based violence in the status quo.

Other problems are prevalent as well. Data collection regarding violators of GBV is near impossible in tense conflict zones. That is, even if the global society had the authority and means to hold individuals accountable, it is hard for each violator to be identified and punished. Hence, it is essential for the international community to find measures to protect women against these crimes in conflict areas.

Past Actions by Nations and Organizations

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the framework adopted by 189 UN member states at the Fourth World Conference on Women to achieve gender equality. It identified "Women and Armed Conflict" as one of its 12 key areas of concern. Contrary to earlier conventions that focused mainly on peacetime gender discrimination, the platform acknowledged that armed conflict intensifies gender inequality. It also identified that shallow defense and military spending miss out on social protection and survivor services.

The Declaration was non-binding in legal form, but its political significance was noticeable. The Declaration soon institutionalized CSW, which is responsible for coordinating global progress on gender equality. Additionally, to ensure long-term continuity, it established a five-year review mechanism under CSW (Beijing +5, +10, +20, +25). At the international level, these reviews directly shaped UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and Women, Peace, and Security resolutions. At the national level, the Declaration required every Member State to set up legal institutions for women's advancement, such as Rwanda's Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Afghanistan's former Ministry of Women's Affairs, or the Philippines' GAD framework. However, since the Declaration was not legally effective, the member states couldn't implement policies legally. For instance, the funding remained inconsistent as the survivor services were still heavily under-resourced. In conflict zones, weak governance and patriarchal norms made the reports of GBV seem minor. Hence, the Declaration showed that norms themselves don't ensure protection. Therefore, delegates should consider ways in which the Declaration reinforces enforcement, financial accountability, and political visibility.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

CSW incorporated the WPS agenda into one of its main goals. The agenda was adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2000. WPS has been crucial because it directly links GBV in conflict zones to issues of peace, security, and post-conflict recovery. Up until now, WPS calls for the protection, participation, prevention, and recovery of women and girls (4 pillars) in conflict zones. WPS agenda mandates early-warning systems, gender-sensitive training for armed forces, and stronger legal prohibitions against GBV as a weapon of war. It ensures women and girls in conflict zones have access to shelters, reproductive health care, legal aid, and psychosocial support. According to the UN Women Data Portal (2024), "on average, women made up only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories to peace agreements and ceasefire agreements". WPS emphasizes that increasing the representation of women ensures that peace agreements address GBV from the outset. WPS ensures that recovery programs rebuild institutions, emphasize integrating gender perspectives into humanitarian response and reconstruction, and encourage investment in economic empowerment for women returning from displacement.

United Nations

The United Nations was responsible for establishing the Beijing Platform for Action and UNSCR 1325 mentioned above. Furthermore, in 2008, the UN Security Council recognised that GBV can constitute a war crime that is against human rights laws. Accordingly, these activities led to how GBV in war needs to be treated as a crime and a policy priority. Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 2467 enabled sanction listings of armed actors who use rape as a tactic of war and referral to the ICC and hybrid tribunals. Moreover, the UN helped create conditions where sexual violence cases in conflict areas were actually punished. Anchored in the Secretary General's annual reports on CRSV, the UN's system of monitoring and sanctions has become one of the few mechanisms that can turn documentation into deterrence. More specifically, the UN was able to report any abuses and violations to state governments and local armed groups. And for the repeat offenders, their names appear year after year in the Secretary General's annexe, getting restricted from access to peacekeeping participation, international funding, and multilateral cooperation. Yet deterrence alone is not enough without domestic accountability.

Hence, the UN engages with national parliaments and justice institutions by guiding the legislators to embed the WPS agenda into their own budgetary and oversight systems.

Moving on, the UN bodies jointly lead the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) on WASH services. More specifically, UNICEF and WHO co-published the 2023 report of "Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) 2000-2022: Special Focus on Gender", which primarily provided the in-depth global analysis of gender inequalities in WASH. Moreover, the UN bodies set the policy agenda for integrating gender into WASH programs.

Women for Women International (WfWI)

WfWI is an NGO that supports women and girls living in conflict and post-conflict settings. Its purpose was to protect and empower women by improving access to WASH services, offering health and livelihood education. WfWI recognized that women and girls face secondary risks when basic water and sanitation services collapse. Accordingly, WfWI trained local women to educate their own communities on how to maintain their sanitation. For instance, in Nigeria, a woman named Grace used tailoring skills from the program launched by WfWI to produce reusable menstrual pads. Moreover, she taught others how to maintain hygiene and created a small income stream in the process. Moreover, in South Sudan, a graduate named Reigna began mobilizing others to secure safe water access even during the dry season.

Even though the program is not legally binding, the program is voluntary and community-based. It addresses both immediate humanitarian aid to the locals and long-term gender equality goals by giving women tools and skills to sustain themselves. Delegates need to consider WfWI's effort because it demonstrates how empowerment and protection through WASH services can have a sustainable impact.

Stances of Major Countries and Organizations

United States of America

The U.S. has pursued a structural approach to addressing GBV in conflict zones. Rather than establishing entirely new agencies, the U.S. focused on strengthening existing judicial

systems within both military and civilian courts. This reflects a long-term strategy to reinforce the rule of law, improving local accountability frameworks. One of the major achievements of the U.S. is that it clearly identifies GBV as a weapon of war rather than a simple crime. Specifically, the DRC Human Rights Report (2023) from the U.S. The Department of State reported that in Congo, 17% of GBV cases involved the misuse of authority by the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC). Up until now, the U.S. has operated the USAID Justice, Accountability, and Gender Program, which is designed to build the capacity of domestic judiciaries to investigate and prosecute sexual violence crimes. Beyond legal accountability, U.S. aid programming also extends to emergency obstetric care, reproductive health services, and vaccination campaigns.

However, the current U.S. position seems to be different. Recently, the Trump administration implemented a sudden foreign aid freeze on USAID grants, claiming the suspension as a process of achieving “American interests and national priorities”. As a result, it quickly dismantled CSW’s Area E (Women and Armed Conflict), especially related to health, sanitation, and protection services for women and girls in conflict zones. The administration cut approximately 92% of awards (≈ 4,100 programs) and eliminated nearly $60 billion in funding. Such terminations strongly affected humanitarian operations in over 120 countries, including conflict zones like Sudan, the DRC, and the Philippines, undermining HIV care, maternal health, and food programs. For instance, in Sudan, the local NGO salaries that supported dozens of dependents were suspended, collapsing community safety nets. The U.S aid freeze also directly disrupted WASH services in conflict zones like the DRC. At clinics like the Buhimba Health Center, pumps and purification systems broke down, forcing residents to rely on unsafe sources like Lake Kivu. This not only increased exposure to waterborne diseases such as cholera but also undermined infection control in already fragile health centers. Moreover, without stable funding, hygiene education campaigns and programs became suspended, reversing years of progress toward safe water access.

Hence, for CSW, the recent U.S. instance became a case study of how women’s safety systems become fragile when they are structurally tied to external donors. The interruption of women’s reproductive health, GBV treatment, and water access due to political instability violates SDG 5 (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls) and 6 (clean

water & sanitation). Accordingly, the international community emphasizes that the U.S. has to restore funding and moral leadership. While the U.S. support is extremely important, the recent stance represents a negative precedent, which urges multi-donor pools and strong local capacity, so that it doesn't get easily influenced by international political status.

United Kingdom

The UK established the "Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative" (PSVI), a cross-departmental initiative led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2012. It convened the first Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, where 1,700 delegates attended, and 113 states endorsed the UN Declaration of Commitment. One of the main achievements of PSVI was implementing the protocol named "International Protocol on Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict". PSVI also deployed the UK TOE to Syria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mali, DRC, and Kosovo for training on documentation, survivor support, and security-sector capacity. It also provided funds to the UN, AU, and ICC Trust Fund for Victims.

However, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) rated the PSVI as "amber-red" on effectiveness, citing its heavy reliance on short-term (usually a year) and limited survivor participation in programme design. Many civil society partners, like women-led NGOs in the Global South, have criticised that projects often end just when local mechanisms are established appropriately, creating a cycle of dependency rather than empowerment. Moving on, as discussed above, the PSVI strongly reflects the UK's justice-oriented framework. However, this approach unintentionally created global divides between North and South due to the privileging of resource-rich states. For instance, the PSVI emphasises forensic documentation of sexual violence. To do so, it requires factors like stable electricity and digital data storage, trained experts, and reliable communication between police, courts, and ministries. As a result, countries with stronger institutions and funding, like Bosnia or Colombia, can comply, while fragile states like the DRC and South Sudan are sidelined.

Possible Solutions

Integrating WASH into the WPS Agenda

The biggest challenge for protecting women and girls in conflict zones is that the organizations lack emphasis on WASH services. Therefore, the first step needed is to institutionalize WASH within the WPS agenda. Responsibility lies primarily with Member States, supported by UN Women, UNICEF, and UN Water. Solutions that can be implemented by these stakeholders are feasible enough. The organizations should provide the operational capacity and field expertise to design conflict-sensitive interventions through the "WASH for Peace" guidance from UNICEF. Moreover, the UN-Water needs to act as the inter-agency coordinator, aligning these programs with SDG 6. All of these actions can build upon robust existing infrastructure like JMP and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. It is feasible both politically and technically. Currently, governments already maintain National Action Plans on WPS, and adding a WASH pillar would require policy alignment rather than arduous legal reform.

The effectiveness of the integration depends on its scalability and sustainability. In other words, the integration should effectively link global policy with localized practice. The primary trade-off may involve diverting resources from traditional peacekeeping activities toward infrastructure. However, the long-term benefits may outweigh these initiatives. For instance, an active integration of WASH facilities may reduce the mortality of women and girls in conflict zones, and improve the skills and knowledge earned by they have regarding the services. Coordination meetings between UN-Women and UNICEF during each CSW session could serve as a joint accountability platform, ensuring that integration remains coherent and pragmatic across countries.

Strengthening WASH Infrastructure and Accountability

Another priority is strengthening quality WASH infrastructure and accountability in conflict regions. Here, UNDP, UN-Women, and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) are responsible for the solution. As for UNDP, they can play a crucial role by providing engineering expertise and on-ground technical support. The UN's development system is highly encouraged

to assist Member States in accelerating the implementation of solutions to gender equality commitments.

Firstly, UNDP would be tasked with managing the logistical chain. For instance, they are responsible for sourcing construction materials and supervising water infrastructure repair in post-conflict regions. Moving on, for UN-Women, they should ensure that every facility for WASH services adheres to gender-sensitive frameworks from the Beijing Platform for Action, which were already reinforced through CSW69. These documents highlight that women's safety and participation must be central to all construction and reconstruction processes. Again, the lack of gender-sensitive WASH facilities directly contributes to GBV and long-term mental health deterioration. Therefore, they should actively provide standardized gender guidelines for sanitation units, like separate and lockable toilets and discreet menstrual waste disposal systems. Next, PBC is well positioned to integrate WASH security auditing within post-conflict reconstruction actions. Building on the precedent of Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019), which reshaped the targeting of essential services like water as a potential war crime, they should classify intentional destruction or blockage of water systems.

Feasibility is guaranteed by the fact that these agencies already co-exist under the UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) structure, allowing for a rapid deployment when water systems fail. Currently, reliable technologies like solar lighting, mobile filtration units, and digital maintenance audits already exist in conflict regions, which reduce start-up barriers. In fact, a gender-segregated and well-lit sanitation system successfully reduced incidents of GBV in Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. Financially, the initiative could draw from pooled donor trust funds or a proposed WASH and Peace Facility.

Sustainable Livelihoods and Women's Participation

Women's Empowerment is inseparable from economic agency. Implementation will depend on joint action between UN-Women, UNDP, and grassroots organizations like WfWI. In order to create sustainable livelihoods and increase women's participation in conflict zones, the exemplary model should start from the idea that access to WASH services can also serve as an economic empowerment in post-conflict recovery. For instance, in South Sudan, WfWI has trained women in basic hygiene management and entrepreneurship through its "Strong Women,

Stronger Nations" program. As a result, participants not only acquired sanitation and health skills, but they were also able to establish small-scale soap-making and menstrual pad production businesses. These businesses provided both a stable income for women and girls and a vital community service, reducing dependency on foreign humanitarian aid. These efforts also normalize women's economic leadership in regions affected by wars and displacement. Similarly, in Nigeria, WfWI's partnership with local NGOs and women's cooperatives implemented the "Pad Project" model, where women and girls were trained to manufacture reusable sanitary pads solely through locally available cotton and sewing machines. These women and girls acted just like producers in normal markets, selling affordable hygiene products to schools and camps, even when poverty was severe. Hence, the initiative addressed gender inequality to a great extent. Hence, the initiative addressed gender inequality to a great extent. For instance, the model created job opportunities for women, improved menstrual health, and reduced the stigma surrounding menstruation through integrating awareness campaigns into the production processes.

Hence, the WASH with Livelihood Model contributes to meaningful changes. At an individual level, women and girls who have been marginalized by conflict. They would restore dignity and pride by acquiring technical and business skills, transforming from the beneficiaries of aid to providers of necessary services in the community. At a broader scope, it contributes to local peacebuilding and social cohesion. When women participate in the construction and production processes of WASH services, they become direct stakeholders in community stability. This links clean water and sanitation to human security. The model also aligns with the Beijing Platform for Action's goal to increase women's participation in economic and social life, SDG 5, and SDG 6. By combining these frameworks, WfWI and similar NGOs may evolve humanitarian aid into long-term development.

Accordingly, Member States can incorporate such programs into national recovery and development strategies, using micro-finance schemes and small-grant programs to support locals. Currently, the materials and technology requirements are modest, like the basic sewing equipment, local fabrics, and simple training modules. Therefore, the model is highly feasible even in conflict zones where resources are scarce and insufficient. Rather than perpetuating dependency on imported hygiene products, the model would successfully generate

self-sufficiency, reinvesting economic benefits within the local community. While the short-term productivity may seem slower compared to direct aid delivery, the long-term result would be proportionately drastic. This is because the female workforce would become more stable, skilled, and independent. Such self-sufficiency would further enhance resilience and social cohesion, leading to sustainable livelihoods.

Improving Access to Data, Monitoring, and Early-Warning Systems

The initiative should be jointly led by the UN-Women's *Women Count* Program, the JMP, and the UN Statistics Division under ECOSOC, partnering with national statistical offices and women-led NGOs. Currently, the primary infrastructure is already built, like the global data platforms, GIS mapping, and mobile survey tools. However, the key obstacle in achieving access is the human. Since there is not sufficient quantity and quality of human capital that can effectively utilize this infrastructure, the organizations need to focus on training enumerators on how to protect data confidentiality and maintain secure databases. While sovereignty concerns among the countries may limit full data sharing, voluntary participation needs to become active, so that political feasibility is attained. Moreover, the stakeholders need to consider ways to record reliable and sex-disaggregated information on WASH accessibility, GBV near water points, and maternal health statistics. This would not only strengthen accountability but also serve as an early-warning system for humanitarian crises. For instance, declining water quality or rising reports of harassment at water sites would immediately signal the stakeholders. The system’s effectiveness is proven through the example demonstrated above, like UNICEF’s real-time cholera tracking in the DRC that drastically reduced SGBV cases. The main challenge requires time and the personnel required for data gathering. These may strain short-term relief operations, but transparent and dogged reporting would build long-term trust between the local communities and international partners. Finally, CSW can review the progress reports uploaded and updated by the UN-Women and UNDP, transforming scattered monitoring into a collaborative and effective structure.

Questions to Consider

- How can Member States ensure that access to WASH services is formally included in their National Action Plans on WPS?
- What would UN-Women's and UNICEF's respective roles be in integrating the WASH and WPS agenda?
- Should WASH be considered a 5th "pillar" of the WPS agenda, or function as a recurring theme?
- How can sovereignty concerns be respected while ensuring accountability for states that are failing to protect women's access to sanitation in conflict zones?
- What mechanisms can verify that new WASH facilities meet gender-sensitive safety standards?
- How might the Peacebuilding Commission or ECOSOC monitor deliberate targeting or weaponization of water systems in conflict regions?
- Can public-private partnerships (PPC) help maintain sanitation systems in fragile states without depending on external stakeholders?
- How can programs like WfWI and the Pad Project be scaled regionally while maintaining cultural sensitivity?
- How can Member States use the statistics to design targeted early-warning systems?
- What are some specific methods for reducing the SGBV incidents in conflict zones other than active WASH services?

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United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Chair Report

[Agenda B: Safeguarding Women's and Girls' Fundamental Right to Education and Freedom of Educational Content]

Yonsei Model United Nations 2026

Chair: Chaeyeon Yoon

Student Officer: Myeongse Kim

About the United Nations

The United Nations is the largest intergovernmental organisation that was founded in 1945 after World War II. Consisting of 193 member states, the United Nations endeavours to sustain international peace, security and cooperation, guided by the United Nations Charter.

A replacement for the League of Nations, the United Nations has been the centre of discussion and euphony for multilateral issues such as general disarmament, international security, multilateral cooperation, international economy, human rights affairs and sustainable development. The United Nations is operated under six major organs - The Secretariat, General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice. The United Nations has also assigned other specialised agencies and rapporteurs in reach for international peace and security.

Sessions of committees pertaining to the United Nations carry arduous responsibilities of perpetuating peace and humanitarian rights. Delegates of member states thrive to represent their designated nation and to form an international consensus on a myriad of agendas.

Committee Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an international organization established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Res. 11 (II) in June 1946. CSW is recognized as the first United Nations (UN) body dedicated to women's rights, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls worldwide. It consists of one representative from each of the 45 Member States elected by the ECOSOC every 4 years. Since 1946, CSW has maintained continuity between conferences that ultimately contributed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) as well as SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Each March, CSW holds two-week sessions at UN headquarters in New York to negotiate and adopt policies and Agreed Conclusions. And in order to not lose track, the official process continuously incorporates follow-up on previous sessions. Furthermore, all of the Agreed Conclusions are transmitted to ECOSOC for further review and implementation tracking.

In practice, CSW collaborates with various stakeholders like governments, UN agencies, civil society, and the private sector. With joint efforts, it aims to achieve gender equality especially during moments of crisis like wars, pandemics, or climate disasters. For example, during the post COVID-19 pandemic recovery, CSW aimed to increase long-term recovery capacity for women, so that they can get back to their workplace just like men.

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CSW69 renewed commitments to accelerate gender equality in every corner of the world and empower women and girls. The future goal of CSW takes into account accelerated implementation and legal accountability, connecting efforts with enforceable actions. Considering the outcomes of CSW69, the next sessions will prioritize eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls through survivor-centered approaches. Along with it, CSW recognizes that true empowerment also depends on technological and educational reformation. Hence, CSW72 aims to address gender-based digital divide, promote women's participation in STEM and AI fields, and ensure safe use of technology. Finally, in line with CSW73's peace agenda, CSW highlights the urgency of protecting women and girls in conflict areas. More specifically, it seeks to release women and girls from hostage situations, support rehabilitation, and implement the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda more actively.

Agenda Introduction

Education essentially provides the foundation for women and girls to attain their potential and fully exercise their capabilities, fulfilling the most fundamental human rights. Currently, many women and girls strive to access quality education. However, gender-based discrimination that is deeply embedded in our current society hinders such opportunities. The discrimination is not easily eliminated as it is built into the education systems through both societal gender norms and institutional infrastructures. These elements determine who gets to learn and what kind of learning is prioritized. Currently, in many societies, women and girls are confined to gender norms such as forced early marriage, household labor expectations, and cultural stigma. These discriminatory actions restrict women and girls' mobility and access to school, particularly after puberty. While it is often claimed that women and girls get proper education, the reality tells a different story. According to UNICEF, 119 million girls are out of school, including 34 million of primary school age, 28 million of lower-secondary school age, and 58 million of upper-secondary school age. Moreover, in areas where conflicts occur, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school as those living in non-affected zones. The social norms are continuously reinforced by structural barriers due to the lack of safe classrooms, female teachers, and gender-sensitive curricula. Moreover, education policies often fail to address the link between poverty and gender, leaving girls from rural or conflict-affected areas the least likely to complete education. These institutional discriminations perpetuate the cycle in which women are underrepresented in higher education, leadership, and political participation.

This agenda is worth discussing precisely because it highlights that education is not a privilege for women that is selectively granted, but a fundamental right that needs to be ensured for all women and girls. Another important dimension lies in the content of education itself. Even though women and girls get access to education, their rights remain unfulfilled if they are subjected to contents that impose discriminatory ideologies. According to the report of *Violence Against Women: Ideologies in Law and Society,* patriarchal systems sustain themselves by defining women's social roles through education that highlights obedience and modesty rather than having critical thought or being empowered. For instance, textbooks and moral instruction in many South Asian countries portray men as someone who has great authority, while portraying women as caregivers. This ideology again implies the thought that men are superior to

women, so that women's intellect and leadership are neglected. Moreover, the European Parliament's 2012 resolution on the attack against Malala Yousafzai emphasizes how extremist groups in Pakistan sought to destroy girls' schools and impose curricula that are based on rigid gender hierarchy. Therefore, the delegates need to come up with multi-faceted solutions that can eliminate harmful practices that prevent women and girls from accessing quality education. Any obstacles that remain at schools, universities, or other institutions need to be monitored and managed by governments through effective policies. These efforts would indeed help achieve our Sustainable Development Goal #5 – Gender Equality.

Key Terms

Rights to Education

The right to education refers to having access to learning that is solid in its standards, clear in its intention, and inclusive regardless of background. Without a clear definition, states can claim to provide education while still restricting who can learn or what can be learned. A well-defined right to education, such as Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasizes that learning must promote the full development of the human personality that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms. Historically, many women and girls get denied this right because of social norms and discriminatory actions. CSW promotes this principle to ensure that education serves as a tool for equality and empowerment.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes refer to the rooted and socially transmitted beliefs about certain traits and roles of men and women that shape how children perceive themselves and others. Gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in cultural norms, especially in current sub-Saharan and South Asian regions, which denotes the difficulty of eliminating them. CSW prioritizes ruling out any forms of gender stereotypes injected into society that create obstacles for women and girls attaining rights to education.

Digital Divide

Digital divide refers to unequal access to reliable technology or the internet. In many regions, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, women and girls are disproportionately excluded from digital access because of restrictive cultural norms, safety concerns, and limited mobility. Recently, the right to education has increasingly become dependent on digital access, and women and girls who lack access to this digital world face difficulties in accessing schooling and employment opportunities. UNESCO reports that globally, 244 million fewer women than men use the internet. Moreover, in sub-Saharan Africa, women's proficiency in basic digital tasks, such as using spreadsheets, can be less than half that of men. Hence, closing the digital divide is essential to ensure equal participation and access to rights to education in technology-driven societies.

Knowledge Sovereignty

Knowledge sovereignty is the principle that all people have the right to produce, share, and access knowledge without barriers. Without knowledge sovereignty, education can easily become a one-way transmission of dominant ideologies rather than a space for critical, active thoughts. It is crucial as it counteracts the dominance of gender-based discriminatory perspectives within education systems. Guaranteeing knowledge sovereignty empowers women and girls to become not just recipients of education but also active contributors to knowledge creation.

Policy Mainstreaming

Policy mainstreaming is defined as integrating gender perspectives into all levels of educational policies, which reinforces that every educational reform considers its impact on women and girls. The concept of gender mainstreaming emerged from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which recognized that isolated women's programs were insufficient to achieve gender equality. When effectively implemented, it will satisfy SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), as it ensures that women's rights are upheld in every decision. Therefore, CSW puts emphasis on such an approach to transform gender equality from a single, detached issue into a universal principle across all sectors.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs are referred to as long-term contracts between governments and private companies to provide certain public goods or services. This is a critical terminology that can bring together governments, civil society, and the private sector to expand educational resources and innovation. For instance, private companies may bring digital tools, e-learning platforms, and STEM training programs that governments may lack the capacity or technology to develop. When implemented transparently, PPPs make education policy financially sustainable and relevant. However, without appropriate, strong regulation, PPPs risk worsening inequality if private companies prioritize profits over justice.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability for individuals to effectively and safely use digital tools for learning. It allows women and girls to navigate digital platforms and gather essential information safely. Access alone does not guarantee meaningful participation among women and girls. Even though many women and girls who can access electronic devices and the internet are still held back by limited digital skills due to gendered expectations. Hence, without deliberate investment, the unequal capacity of digital access will perpetuate unequal participation in STEM fields and tech jobs.

Historical Background

Before the late 19th century, most women and girls had little to no access to formal education. Instead, they were expected to do their housework, reflecting the strict gender roles in society. For instance, in rural Europe, schooling among girls who were beyond the age of 14 was extremely rare. Girls were instructed to focus on housework and artistic talents such as dancing and drawing, revealing how the scope of education was restricted solely to reinforcing women's subordinate position. The Industrial Revolution gradually increased appropriate access to education. However, most schools for women were still shaped by patriarchal ideals regardless of societal hierarchy. Upper-class girls received private "family education" to become refined and cultured women, and lower-class girls learned how to serve men appropriately rather than seek autonomy. These subjects were meant to convert domestic work into an institutionalised

knowledge that disciplined women as “professional caregivers”. In this way, women's education was used as a mechanism of social control.

Even though progress was uneven, especially in conservative and politically unstable environments, the women’s rights movement and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sparked a subtle change in women's access to education. In the 1970s, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) bound governments to get rid of discriminatory measures, such as marriage laws that forced girls to drop out. Moreover, the World Declaration on Education for All, established in 1990, advocated equal access to education across the world. Unfortunately, these efforts were still not satisfactory, as gender stereotypes and economic disparity consistently constrained the educational access of women and girls in most of the developing regions. Many developing countries lack the administrative capacity and funding system to monitor gender equality in education. Moreover, the biggest burden in such states is the cultural resistance overriding legal commitments, making it difficult for women and girls to get educated. Lastly, when the developing regions are heavily dependent on external aid, they are likely to follow agendas set by the donors rather than community needs, resulting in short-term or urban-centred systems that fail to reach women and girls in rural areas.

Moving on, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action highlighted the “Education and Training of Women” as one of the 12 key areas of concern. It emphasised providing curricula that are free of gender discrimination, promoting women’s and girls’ lifelong education. Later, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially Goal 2 (Universal Primary Education) and Goal 3 (Gender Equality), made some achievements. According to the UN, the target of making all children, boys and girls alike, could complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. And fortunately, the target was met, with primary school enrollment reaching 91% in developing regions by 2015.

Up until now, there are still ongoing struggles, especially in conflict or rural zones, to attain a fully comprehensive access to quality education. An exemplary human figure is Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist who advocates for the right of every child to receive a quality education. In Pakistan, there existed extremist ideologies that sought to ban girls from studying and obtaining professional skills. At age 11, Malala began blogging for BBC Urdu through a pseudonym, describing the fear of losing educational opportunity for women and girls under

Taliban control. Despite several threats from the Taliban, she continued speaking in local and international forums, emphasising that education is not a Western concept but a human right. In 2012, Malala was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman on her way home from school. The intention was to silence Malala, thereby preventing further movements that motivate women and girls for access to quality education. However, Malala miraculously recovered, symbolising a dogged resistance despite discriminatory external threats.

Status Quo

Education Parity Without Equality

Over the past two decades, international efforts have made undeniable progress in increasing educational opportunities for women and girls. According to UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, global completion rates for girls in primary education have risen from 85% in 2015 to 87% in 2021. Furthermore, the Global Gender Gap Report 2025 highlights that women have reached 95.1% parity in educational attainment, indicating that formal barriers, such as discriminatory policies, have been reduced.

However, these achievements question whether true equality has been achieved. The same data reveal that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the primary completion rate falls below 65%. Moreover, the UN Women 2025 update notes that 15 million girls under the age of 12 remain out of school, compared with 10 million boys, and in some regions, nearly half of all girls are still excluded from educational opportunity. This indicates that, despite some progress, the efforts of UN initiatives and organizations have thus far failed to address the regions and cultures primarily responsible for the outcome outlined above. While it is also important that gender parity exists in countries like the U.S., UK, or Japan, it is worth noting that it is mostly African, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries that need more attention. In Afghanistan, for instance, 78% of young women are not in education, employment, or training, costing 2.5% of the national GDP each year. Again, in these regions, an increase in superficial access to education is not enough. Early marriage, domestic labor expectations, and social stigma shut off any pursued efforts to attain primary, secondary, and tertiary education opportunities. Currently, the education systems

have succeeded in bringing girls into schools and classrooms, but have yet to dismantle the gender stereotypes and social norms that decide whose learning matters more.

Gender Norms and Social Reproduction

WEF (2025) finds that women's educational attainment has reached 95.1% parity, while their economic participation remains only around 61%. The disappointing outcome reflects how social expectations continue to restrict women and girls from transitioning from learning to work. The reason behind such an outcome is less in access and more in how societies value women's knowledge. Even if women and girls hardly gain an opportunity to go to primary schools, the content of education is still encroached by gender stereotypes. Many girls still face gender bias in classrooms, where teachers expect less from them in math or science fields, and curricula continue to portray male-dominated content. Hence, this perpetuates the destructive cycle of women and girls being discouraged from pursuing diverse expertise, pushing them into unpaid domestic roles. Even across regions, school systems continue to reproduce Eurocentric and male-dominated principles. Therefore, women's histories, local voices, and indigenous epistemologies are often neglected in the curricula. Additionally, in conservative states, attempts to include gender studies or reproductive rights are strictly forbidden under the accusation of "westernisation".

While global organisations such as UNESCO and UNGEI have launched gender-sensitive curricula frameworks and textbook reforms, these efforts frequently face resistance from governments that fear cultural backlash. Another important factor is the stances of international donors. It is undeniably true that they promote women and girls' inclusion in education. However, in order to obtain immediate results, they often tie funding to measurable economic outcomes like Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) enrollment or workforce participation. Accordingly, many programs implemented by such organisations equate women's empowerment with employability. This prevents women and girls from critically thinking about the social norms and getting motivated. Feminist educators in South Asia and the Middle East have criticised the measurement as "neoliberal feminism in education", which is a model that values girls' education only to serve development agendas. Hence, what is crucial is not teaching women and girls how to code and solve mathematical questions. Instead, the international and local communities should primarily help women and

girls comprehend the discriminatory social structure and get empowered to obtain their own rights. This would ultimately build a sustainable environment where women and girls truly acknowledge their dignity and right to education.

Digital Division

After the COVID-19 pandemic, education rapidly changed its form through an online format, revealing a new layer of inequality. According to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), over 222 million girls globally were affected by school closures, and millions failed to return to formal learning. While digital platforms tried to come up with solutions, they only exposed a digital divide. In developing regions, women and girls are 17% less likely than men to access the internet, and in parts of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the gap widens further to 40%. While access to the internet seems to be the sole problem, it is, in fact, not true. Even where access exists, digital spaces are also encroached on by gender discrimination. Women and girls are prone to harassment, surveillance, and algorithmic bias. In fact, governments in conservative contexts have increasingly adopted online safety laws to monitor educational content, censor feminist discussions, and restrict access to reproductive health education. The situation worsened through an easy manipulation of power through online censorship. Moreover, private ed-tech companies are often based on the male user behavior, embedding bias into AI-driven curricula and algorithms. These invisible coding systems are reproducing traditional gender inequalities, creating a digital divide.

The digital divide has created challenges for impoverished women in education and the future job markets. Many girls in the Middle East and Africa lack digital literacy and access to adequate technology to participate in the modernizing education system. In a world where educational content and access to resources require a basic level of digital literacy, financial barriers exclude girls in certain regions from modern education. The UN Secretary-General emphasizes the need to address the digital gap. Without resolving this issue, women and girls will continue to be left behind in science, technology, and other STEM-related fields.

International bodies like UNESCO and UNGEI have launched various initiatives like "Girls' Education through ICTs" to reduce the gap between women and men by focusing on improving digital literacy, teacher training, and safe online environments. Moreover, NGOs like

Equality Now and Plan International introduced several mentorship and coding programs for girls. However, these efforts remain concentrated in middle-income or urban regions. In many low-income or rural areas, the lack of gender-sensitive ICT policies and restrictive governmental policies prevents such initiatives from being intact.

There are many criticisms regarding the digital revolution that tries to solve the digital divide. Many criticize the growing influence of surveillance capitalism in the digital education sector. For instance, there is a risk that private tech companies collect student data without consent and shape what content is appropriate for women and girls. In the digital environment where feminist networks and empowerment videos are flagged as political and algorithms secretly eliminating dissenting material, it seems urgent to come up with a solution.

In patriarchal contexts like the Taliban's Afghanistan example, knowledge is monopolized by male religious authorities who decide the rights to education and the content of learning. This abuse of control over knowledge production marginalizes women's experiences and voices, leading to a loss of knowledge sovereignty.

Past Actions by Nations and Organizations

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, and is still to this day the landmark framework that affirms women's right to education. It was initiated primarily by CSW, but what makes it distinct from other UN initiatives like Education for All (EFA) or United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is that CEDAW is legally binding. Member States should reform their laws and submit periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee in Geneva, which creates one of the few enforceable accountability systems. CEDAW aims to eliminate the structural gender discrimination prevalent in the law, policy, and schools. For instance, its work did not merely end when they opened schools for women and girls. Instead, they tried to dismantle family codes, marriage laws, and labor systems that initially restricted women's mobility and freedom. Moreover, in countries like Pakistan or Afghanistan, CEDAW's

framework permitted local activists, such as Malala Yousafzai, to challenge educational discrimination as a violation of human rights, not just one of the cultural norms.

Still, the influence has been limited due to the biased interpretation of the states. While the countries ratified CEDAW, they ruled out any provisions that conflict with their religions or customs. For instance, in some Middle Eastern and South Asian States, they declared that they would not apply the provisions that contradict Islamic Sharia law. Unfortunately, these are the ones that directly relate to the suppression of women and girls' education, such as early marriage, family duties, or restricted mobility. Accordingly, laws that permit girls to marry young or prioritize domestic roles over education remained intact. Therefore, the biggest challenge for CEDAW would be finding pragmatic ways in which the cultural norms and political will would also adjust to the strict, legally binding system.

UNESCO

UNESCO launched the EFA initiative at the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum with collaboration of other UN agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, and UNFPA. This marked a global turning point in recognizing education for women and girls as a fundamental human right. One of its goals was to achieve universal primary education and eliminate gender disparities by 2015, implying the idea that quality education for women and girls are necessary for sustainable development. According to UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report on Gender and Education for All (2015), the EFA initiative was unique from other earlier international efforts. First of all, EFA achieved policy mainstreaming, integrating gender equality into the entire education system. It pointed out to address any obscure gender stereotypes in curricula, teacher training, and textbooks. Moreover, EFA successfully identified cultural and infrastructure barriers that can often deter women and girls from continuing school even when enrollment is available. As a result, it encouraged gender-sensitive teacher recruitment and safe sanitation facilities. The latter was central to keeping girls in school, especially after puberty. UNESCO's data showed that a lack of separate and hygiene toilets often cause them to drop out in many developing regions. This was because girls were exposed to harassment or privacy violations in unsafe conditions.

However, EFA was still not enough as it heavily depends on the degree of national participation and the institutional strength of each Member State. While the global consensus is appropriate, there is not enough administrative capacity and resources, especially in rural areas, to enforce gender equality in education. Moreover, as UNESCO's report revealed, despite EFA achieving parity in primary education, secondary and tertiary education still remain largely inaccessible to girls in places like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Again, the local areas are still influenced by cultural, discriminatory ideologies that perpetuate child marriage, GBV, and religious extremism. Hence, despite the efforts, the problems, such as the lack of enforcement measures and disproportionate efforts of countries, cause unequal implementation of such efforts. In many countries, financially able countries tend to work on gender equality more, while countries that lack financial means fail to meet global standards. While the lack of cooperation between countries is among the key factors that cause global disparity in women's education, individual countries' efforts are equally important in improving girls' educational freedom and access to safe content.

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

The UNGEI was launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000, coordinated by UNICEF in partnership with UNESCO, UNFPA, UNDP, and the World Bank. It emerged right after the EFA goals and MDGs 2 (Achieve Universal Primary Education) and 3 (Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women), aiming to translate global commitments into pragmatic change at the local level. Its mission was to help governments fulfill their responsibility to rule out recurring gender barriers in education. Unlike previous programs that focused narrowly on enrollment, UNGEI emphasized the quality and content of education. It acknowledged that parity in numbers does not always equal equality in practice. Hence, in the 2010s, it began integrating STEM education into its agenda, responding to evidence that girls' access to science and technology education remained severely limited by gender stereotypes, textbook biases, and teacher expectations. By collaborating with UNESCO and UNICEF, UNGEI supported gender-sensitive STEM curricula, teacher training, and mentorship programs, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. These efforts sought to reframe STEM as an equal opportunity for sustainable development rather than a male domain.

However, while the UNGEI's goal was ideal, its impact was uneven. UNGEI at 10 (2010) realized that while partnerships succeeded at both the international and local levels, implementation was often delayed nationally due to a lack of functioning, ownership, and technical expertise. Moreover, STEM-focused reforms remain rather superficial when they are introduced on the local level. This was because the social change was still minimal: girls could enroll in science fields, yet still face gender discrimination. For example, in Kenya and Nepal, girls who enrolled in science classes often dropped out soon after facing sexual harassment from male classmates or teachers who doubted their ability. In northern Nigeria, early marriage laws continued to push girls out of school before reaching secondary education, even after scholarships and STEM labs were provided by UNGEI. Therefore, while UNGEI's efforts showed that the pragmatic inclusion of women and girls in the education fields through active partnerships is more important than just opening schools, it still remains a challenge for the initiative to be effective at the local level.

Stances of Major Countries and Organizations

European Union (EU)

The European Union shares a united goal towards gender equality. For example, the EU implements gender equality practices through shared plans, including the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. In this plan, the EU aims to close the gaps between genders through promoting fair pay, reducing gender-related violence, challenging gender stereotypes, and empowering women by increasing public representation. The EU works at the forefront of gender related issues, aiming to eradicate any disparities that exist between genders.

United States

The United States, along with the EU, is one of the biggest advocates for female representation and empowerment. The US, however, takes a slightly different approach from the EU. The US has publicly set girls' education as a priority for foreign policy. The US's strategy documents link girls' education to a direct increase in expression, freedom, and safety from certain gender-related violence and crime. Hence, the US prioritizes providing education to

adolescent girls, which will result in long-term empowerment in a natural way, without the need for excessive government intervention.

China

The Chinese government pays attention to gender disparities in education. The government has listed several actions that the government must take to reach gender equality in education. However, the government has made sure that the educational systems and curricula should not change because of the increased female participation; rather, the state should remain in power over the education the students receive. Furthermore, the Chinese government labelled female participation in politics as an issue that should be considered after the achievement of gender equality in education.

Russia

In past years, Russia was a public supporter of female education and their freedom in expression and participation. However, domestic and higher education policies in recent years have shown a movement towards state control and constraints on freedom. Critics argue that gender equality will not be free from this repression. Furthermore, with stronger state control, the educational content, including that of gender equality.

Saudi Arabia

Recently, the government has started intervening in education to promote gender equality and combat social norms. However, social stereotypes and gender norms that exist in Arab countries hinder this development. Even with the government support, equal access to educational material is increasingly difficult, as curricular freedom is tightly monitored by religious authorities rather than the government itself.

Afghanistan

Since 2021, with the entrance of the de facto government Taliban, Afghanistan has imposed severe restrictions against the education of girls. Although heavily out of line with the UN's disciplines of approaches to gender equality in education, Afghanistan justifies the country's status with cultural and religious norms. The country argues that with the level of

insecurity and severe instability, educational systems must conform to the government's cultural and religious standards.

Possible Solutions

Accountability and Cultural Dialogue

What girls learn needs to seed a power that challenges gender stereotypes, building critical capacity for women and girls, rather than simply injecting coding programs. Moreover, under UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM), different curriculum reform committees that are composed of female educators, scholars, and students can ensure to review local national syllabi and systems. Adding on, the international organizations should encourage the establishment of civil-society organizations like local women's rights groups and teachers' unions, reinforcing the independence of education and its content from governmental influence. As for administrative fields, frameworks like the African Union's Continental Education Strategy (CESA 2025) or ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines could reinforce the audits within existing policies to eliminate duplication.

The feasibility of enhancing local accountability and cultural dialogue is possible, as the efforts can be done through existing infrastructure, like the CEDAW's periodic review system and UNESCO's GEM framework. What is required is the expansion of human resources and training. The trained gender auditors would evaluate whether education budgets, curricula, and teacher policies appropriately reflect the international framework. These auditors need to be placed within national ministries of education for their effectiveness. And to eliminate any cultural and governmental influences, the joint UN-state system can be coordinated collaboratively. Not just auditors, but also ways of collecting and standardising information need reformation. When gathering national statistical information regarding dropout rates, scholarship allocation, and measuring school safety, they can easily be influenced and distorted by governments and local authorities. Hence, the international organisations need to establish national data systems that can enhance transparency and accuracy. A promising model is the Malala Fund's Education Champion Network that funds grassroots activists who locally work on curriculum, policy reform, and digital literacy.

However, the main challenge lies in political resistance. Such mandatory auditing and efforts on transparency may be regarded and banned under the name of “westernization”. Moreover, there may be a trade-off between international standardization and cultural sensitivity. While universal indicators and standardization make comparison easier to check the outlook of women and girls’ education, they often fail to capture how inequality looks in different regions. For instance, while Afghanistan takes the form of early marriage and physical abuse, Japan is more about online discrimination and curriculum bias. However, if every country is mandated to design its own localized metrics, results may become inconsistent and hard to compare. Therefore, the approach needs to smartly combine the two models, finding ways in which global standardization ensures transparency, and region-specific indicators that reflect local realities.

Feminist Digital Transformation

The international organisations should keep in mind that the gendered digital divide is not only about a lack of internet access or devices. Rather, it is more about who controls digital infrastructure, designs technology, and benefits from it. To reform gender equality in access to education for women and girls in the digital world, a joint effort is needed from public, private, and multilateral actors. PPP would play a central role in reducing the digital divide. While the governments provide legal frameworks and subsidies for the private companies, the private-sector actors would practically contribute to infrastructure, appropriate software, and innovation capacity. For instance, telecom providers can partner with ministries of education to expand low-cost internet access and learning platforms for girls in rural regions, following the model of UNESCO’s Girls in ICT initiative. Moreover, ed-tech companies like Google or Microsoft can co-fund open-access digital libraries and cloud-based classrooms that prioritise female students. UN Women and ICT should ensure that these companies comply with gender-sensitive data protection standards.

At the local level, PPPs can fund local hubs that contribute to digital innovation. These hubs could emerge from existing programs like Kenya’s AkiraChix or India’s Digital Sakhi. Here, private investors may fund hardware and training for women and girls, and NGOs manage recruiting experts and mentorship. The key to this effort is that PPPs need to be governed through transparent contracts. For instance, the telecom providers could receive tax incentives or

public recognition only when they demonstrate measurable progress in female digital participation.

Yet, even with well-designed PPPs, deeply conservative or culturally restrictive governments may remain unwilling to expand such infrastructure for girls and women. One of the ways to solve this is reframing the narrative of efforts. Rather than framing digital inclusion of women and girls as tied to liberation, the international organizations may connect it to "educating children, improving healthcare, or modernizing rural economies". UNESCO and ITU may support ministries in developing nations through such campaigns, working with local media, teachers, and influential religious figures. Moving on, regional frameworks like the *African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy* or *ASEAN ICT Masterplan* may act as mediators between international norms and local politics. While the conservative states reject the UN frameworks, they may accept peer-led regional norms and commitments, especially when it is tied to competition or collective, joint progress.

Creation of Job Opportunities

Job opportunities are often the foundation of social and educational gender equality. Often, cultural stereotypes or gender norms create obstacles for women in the workplace. Seeing women in the job market, regardless of the significance of the job, gently adjusts the gender norms. Now the question is: if it is so easy for women to start working, why is it not happening in certain countries? The problem is, most employers are reluctant to hire female employees, mainly due to gender stereotypes. A method of combating this issue is for the government to provide job opportunities in women-suited industries. For example, female products prioritize female workers for a job. At the same time, the government should provide job-specific education for women, which creates educational opportunities. Together, the society will see an increase in employment opportunities, involvement in society, with education targeted for women. As this cycle continues, women will find jobs at higher positions and become more empowered. This, in turn, empowers women and provides the foundation for educational equality.

Questions to Consider

- How can countries ensure that educational programs can develop equally, despite cultural norms?
- What actions can governments take domestically, and what actions must be taken as an international community to promote gender equality in education?
- Why is educational equality especially important to the overall topic of gender disparities?
- How can curriculum reform help dismantle gender stereotypes that discourage girls from pursuing certain fields?
- How can international organizations such as CSW better monitor countries' commitment to gender equality, and what methodologies can guarantee that all countries move in the right direction?
- What are some specific methods or technologies regarding education that can help girls' education in difficult situations? (e.g., conflict zones, refugees, impoverished areas)
- How can we ensure that conservative and culturally restrictive governments comply with the frameworks established by international authorities like UNESCO and CSW?

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