

WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Global Status of Women

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Letter from the Editor

Many believe the term “the women’s movement,” is a misnomer. In fact, there are many “women’s movements” that seek to address the range of inequalities experienced by women all over the globe. And all these movements are really about more than women – they are based on the realization that the empowerment of half the world’s population is not only a fundamental human rights issue, but also a means to a better, healthier, more productive society for all. In this edition of the Monitor, we examine the root causes, the symptoms, and the nuances behind the statistics relating to women’s representation in much that is good and bad in the world today. Although grim at times, especially as it relates to women in living in poverty, the story is about potential as much as it is about vulnerability.

Sincerely,

The World Savvy Monitor Team

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Issue in Focus



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Did You Know?

- When unpaid as well as paid labor is considered, women work more hours than men, a trend that begins early in life and holds true throughout the world.
- Women and girls make up 70% of the world's poor and two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.
- Globally, women earn only 75 cents on every dollar earned by men, often for performing the same work. The U.S. is in line with the global average, and this gap has decreased by only one half of one cent over the last 40 years, despite equal pay legislation and the overall expansion of the U.S. economy.
- The countries that perform the best on nearly all indicators of gender equality are the Nordic (Scandinavian) countries. The worst performers tend to be in the Middle East, South and West Asia, and Sub Saharan Africa. U.S. progress toward women's empowerment continues to be uneven.
- Girls who are educated have fewer children, experience better health, and have exponentially more economic opportunities. Worldwide, 63% of countries have achieved gender equality in primary school enrollment, but only 37% have gender parity at the secondary school level.
- When family subsistence farming is factored in, women grow 60-80% of the world's food, yet typically own less than 2% of the land. Less than 10% of the world's financial credit is extended to women.
- In countries with a modicum of democracy most women now possess the legal right to vote, yet many still lack access, education, and empowerment to exercise that right.
- The international goal for percentage of women in government positions is 30%. Only 19 of 192 countries currently meet that goal. The United States is not one of them, with women in only 15% of government positions. The highest percentage of women legislators and government officials is found in Rwanda with 40%.
- Over 500,000 women die each year from (largely preventable) complications of pregnancy or childbirth; another 18 million become disabled. Ninety-eight percent of these women are in the developing world. A pregnant woman in Niger has a 1 in 7 chance of dying; a pregnant woman in Ireland has a 1 in 47,600 chance. In the U.S., this figure is 1 in 4800.
- Globally, 1 in 3 women will experience some type of domestic violence. There is little difference between poor and rich countries on this measure.
- Only 8 countries in the world have failed to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): The United States, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Nauru, Palau, and Tonga.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Understanding the Headlines

How is the Global Status of Women Linked to Gender Inequality?

- Put simply, women comprise approximately half of the world's population. All things being equal, they should experience both the good and the bad at a 50% rate. Yet, women are overrepresented in negative status indicators, and they are underrepresented in positive status indicators.
- Women's lower status in society is a result of (and is reflected in) laws, practices, values, and attitudes that favor men over women in many realms.
- A **cycle** is at work. Women enjoy lower status because of the way the system works. The system works the way it does because women's lower status limits their ability to change it.
- Feminism, often given a bad name, is not about flipping the equation and disadvantaging men. It is about **creating equality and empowering women** to be the agents of their own status.

Gender Equality is Both an End in Itself and a Means to an End

- As an end, **gender equality is a human rights issue**. Gender inequality and discrimination violate internationally-accepted human rights standards. That fully half of the world's population experiences some abrogation of rights on the basis of gender is an issue of rights, not merely of "fairness."

- Gender equality is also a **means to critical ends** – not only for women themselves, but for society as a whole. Women who are healthy, educated, economically empowered, and free from restrictions to exercise their full potential not only experience greater well-being, but they also are better parents, community members, leaders, and global problem solvers. With the variety of vexing issues facing the world today, it makes sense to bring the full array of the world's talent to the table.
- The most research in gender equality has been done around anti-poverty efforts. Numerous studies show that **investment in women pays off in a country's overall economic development**. Aid, finance, and trade policies that recognize this are seen as holding great promise for poverty eradication around the world.
- Some suggest that **global security** is another realm where women's potential is largely untapped. If most wars are about resources and dignity, groups such as the Global Fund for Women believe that the world should start talking about security in terms of ensuring fundamental physical and social human needs, an area where women are most experienced.

Is Gender Discrimination Largely About Economics?

- There is no question that poor women and girls in poor countries fare the worst on nearly all gender equality measures – they have the hardest lives and the fewest options of anyone on the planet. Slightly better off are poor women and girls in wealthier countries.
- Addressing the myriad of issues facing these women requires economic empowerment, since poverty is associated with a wide range of awful outcomes. Contributing to their poverty, women currently hold title to only 2% of the world's land, have access to only 10% of the world's credit, and are more likely to hold poorly paid jobs with little job security.
- Discrimination is also about culture, religion, society, and politics. Unfortunately a microloan to a woman who is restricted by tradition, societal norms, poor health, and inaccessible education and business training is likewise restricted in the amount of good it can effectuate. Even if she enjoys better than average mobility, capacity, and capabilities, lack of infrastructure in her community to support her efforts is often crippling.
- Instead of simple economic aid, a holistic and comprehensive approach is required.

What About Women in the Developed World Who Do Not Live in Poverty or in Excessively Patriarchal Societies?

- Nearly all women, whether they realize it or not, even advantaged women living in wealthy countries, experience gender discrimination of some kind. It may be more subtle, often described as an “undertow.”
- Consider the case of the U.S. In terms of their health and safety, American women of every race and socioeconomic class are just as likely to be victims of gender violence as women anywhere in the world.
- In terms of power and decision-making, women in the U.S. are found in less than 15% of top corporate jobs and political offices. They earn 75 cents, or less, on every male dollar earned, often for the same job. The sticky floor and glass ceiling still apply in many

professions despite laws that have sought to eradicate it. Gender stereotyping plays a role.

- Women everywhere do more caregiving and household chores than men, even when also fully employed outside the home.

How Has Globalization Been Good for Women?

- Globalization has had a significant effect in the **creation of new jobs**, especially in the developing world, as women have come to staff the manufacturing and service jobs of the “global supply chain.” This has allowed millions of women to enter the paid work force and has contributed to many escaping poverty.
- Enhanced **interconnectivity** has also been a plus, facilitating communication, advocacy, and activism.

How Has Globalization Been Bad for Women?

- Both of the above benefits contain downsides as well, and often end up leading to the exploitation of women. These new factory jobs can be dangerous and offer little hope for advancement. Intense international competition has led to a “**race to the bottom**” in many industries, negatively impacting both wages and working conditions. Enhanced interconnectivity in the form of porous borders means increased sex trafficking.
- Globalization has frayed the fabric of many societies. Migration has been **disruptive to families and communities** as people disperse throughout the world looking for employment that is often transitory. A focus on export and trade often means neglecting local needs. Women bear the burden in increased time spent in unpaid work (caregiving, basic provisioning) to compensate for these changes.

Is the News All Bad?

- No! A “tipping point” in our lifetimes is not inconceivable. As Vice President of Programs Shalini Nataraj, of the Global Fund for Women has said, there was a time not too long ago when people could not conceive of the Berlin Wall coming down, or when smoking would be considered a social taboo. Consciousness raising is underway about gender

inequality and work is being done on multiple levels, from grassroots endeavors to the UN. Critical mass is building.

- When trying to affect gender inequality in systems, values and attitudes, progress in one area builds on progress in the others – this can include conversations around the dinner table, combating exploitive images of women in the media, and passing laws and holding governments accountable.
- Progress is not always captured in statistics and indices. A lot of information, especially when it concerns people who tend to be marginalized in society, doesn't make its way into data banks. There is a lot of qualitative information that suggests women are making progress in ways not conventionally measured. For example, the fact that many women in traditional, patriarchal cultures have a voice – such as speaking out about community affairs, talking about previously taboo subjects, or telling their own stories – is significant, but not reported.

Annotated Timeline

Date	Select Timeline of Events in Modern World History Reflecting the Status of Women
1755	Corsican Republic grants constitutional universal suffrage to adults aged 25 and over, until they are annexed by France.
1776	State of New Jersey's constitution allows women to vote, but the right is rescinded in 1807 which then restricts votes to white males only.
1848	<p>Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention held in New York, USA.</p> <p>Married Women's Property Act passes in New York, most comprehensive state law yet allowing women to maintain control of their own property and financial assets, which had previously been turned over to husbands upon marriage.</p>
1855	American women's rights activist Lucy Stone marries Henry Blackwell and publicly declares their "Marriage Protest" at their wedding. Blackwell renounces all non-mutual rights given legally to husbands after marriage, including the rights to the woman's person and exclusive guardianship of children.
1868	Passage of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees equal protection under the law.
1869	Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton form the National Women's Suffrage Association and begin lobbying for the enfranchisement of women in the U.S.
1872	Susan B. Anthony and 13 other American suffragists cast votes in the presidential election, claiming their 14th Amendment rights. They are arrested two weeks later.
1893	New Zealand is the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote.
1906-1919	<p>The Nordic (Scandinavian) countries give women equal voting rights, followed by Russia, most Eastern European nations, Germany, Austria, and Canada.</p> <p>Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in the U.S.</p>

Date	Select Timeline of Events in Modern World History Reflecting the Status of Women
1920	The United States grants equal suffrage to women through passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.
1921-WWII	<p>More European nations grant women the vote, including Italy, U.K. (1928), and France. Women are also granted the right in some Latin American countries, Turkey (1926) and South Africa (whites only).</p> <p>Women are employed throughout wartime societies.</p> <p>U.S. elects first female Governor (Wyoming).</p> <p>Aviator Amelia Earhart crosses the Atlantic Ocean alone.</p>
1946-1948	<p>The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is established as part of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).</p> <p>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the UN General Assembly.</p> <p>Women are granted the right to vote in more Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries.</p>
1949-1950	China and India extend voting to women.
1952-1962	<p>Women's suffrage continues to be extended as many colonies receive their independence in Africa and Asia.</p> <p>The Convention on the Political Rights of Women adopted by the UN General Assembly.</p>
1963-1965	Equal Pay Act passed in U.S.
1964-1966	<p>1964 Civil Rights Act is passed in U.S. prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race or gender.</p> <p>National Organization for Women (NOW) is formed.</p> <p>Indira Gandhi is elected Prime Minister of India.</p>
1967-1971	<p>Golda Meier becomes Prime Minister of Israel.</p> <p>Switzerland becomes one of the last European countries to grant women the vote. Less than 20 nations have yet to achieve gender parity in suffrage rights by this point.</p>
1972-1974	<p>In the U.S., the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is signed but fails to get enough votes for ratification.</p> <p>U.S. Title IX prohibits gender discrimination in education and sports.</p> <p>In Roe v Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that a woman's right to abortion is protected by the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment.</p> <p>Isabel Peron becomes President of Argentina.</p>

Date	Select Timeline of Events in Modern World History Reflecting the Status of Women
1975	<p>International Women's Year is declared by the UN.</p> <p>First UN World Conference on Women is held in Mexico City launching the UN Decade for Women. NGOs participate in parallel conference.</p>
1976-1979	<p>Only 11 countries still have not extended the vote to women (non-democracies excluded).</p> <p>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. Known as the international bill of rights for women, it contains protections and obligations by states to promote and enforce women's rights.</p> <p>Margaret Thatcher becomes Prime Minister of the U.K.</p>
1980-1985	<p>Sandra Day O'Connor becomes the first female U.S. Supreme Court justice in 1981.</p> <p>Geraldine Ferraro becomes the first female U.S. Vice-Presidential candidate in 1984.</p> <p>UN Third World Conference on Women is held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985.</p>
1986-1990	<p>Center for Women's Global Leadership is formed.</p> <p>Corazon Aquino becomes first female President of the Philippines.</p> <p>Benazir Bhutto becomes the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan.</p> <p>Mary Robinson becomes President of Ireland.</p> <p>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is passed.</p>
1991-1994	<p>World Conference on Human Rights is held in Vienna, Austria in 1993 affirming that "the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights."</p> <p>International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo focuses on family planning and women's empowerment.</p> <p>Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.</p> <p>Kim Campbell becomes the first female Prime Minister of Canada; Tansu Ciller becomes the first female PM of Turkey. Janet Reno becomes the first female U.S. Attorney-General.</p> <p>The Violation Against Women Act is passed in U.S.</p>
1995	<p>Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing outlines program of action and critical areas of concern for implementing CEDAW. NGO forum is held again. It is the largest UN gathering in history.</p>

Date	Select Timeline of Events in Modern World History Reflecting the Status of Women
1996-2000	<p>Madeline Albright becomes first U.S. female Secretary of State.</p> <p>International Criminal Court created.</p> <p>U.S. Women's Ice Hockey team wins gold medal at Olympics.</p> <p>Beijing +5 Special Session of the General Assembly is held to strategize about CEDAW's implementation in the 21st Century.</p> <p>Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery is held in Tokyo prosecuting WWII abuses against women.</p>
2000-2006	<p>Millennium Development Goals outline strategy for eradicating poverty, with specific focus on women and girls.</p> <p>International Criminal Court is ratified despite lack of U.S. support. Seven out of 18 elected judges are women.</p> <p>Condoleezza Rice becomes the first African American woman to serve as U.S. Secretary of State.</p> <p>Rwanda elects a record number of female Parliamentarians, surpassing Sweden in having the most number of women in government.</p> <p>Wangari Maathai becomes the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.</p> <p>Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf becomes President of Liberia, and the first female African Head of State.</p> <p>Kuwait grants women the right to vote.</p> <p>Nancy Pelosi becomes the first female U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives.</p>
2008-present	<p>Hillary Clinton becomes the first woman from a major political party to have a serious chance at her party's nomination in a U.S. presidential race.</p> <p>The Afghani Parliament approves a new Shia family code dictating specific restrictions on Shi'ite women, sparking international protests. The laws are subsequently judged to be in violation of the Afghani Constitution that protects women's rights equally.</p> <p>U.S. President Obama vows to repeal the "global gag rule" and to restore U.S. funding for family planning programs worldwide.</p> <p>Special sub-committee is formed on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to address gender issues internationally. As chair, Senator Barbara Boxer has declared passing CEDAW as one of her major goals.</p> <p>Obama Administration has CEDAW under review with the Department of Justice, in preparation for submitting its passage to the Senate.</p>



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Overarching Themes

Why Does Gender Equality Matter Today?

Despite decades of national and international commitments to end gender discrimination, gender equality remains elusive all over the world. The **United Nations Beijing Declaration's 12 Critical Areas of Concern** provide an international framework for action on the advancement and empowerment of women. An examination of each of these areas guides our discussion this month on the current global status of women.

By way of introduction to some of the overarching themes contained in these Critical Areas, we consider a few questions. What is the real import of understanding and addressing the unequal treatment and status of women, in both developed and developing nations? In addition to the obvious desire to eliminate unnecessary and unjust suffering, how does empowering women improve society and the world at large?

Gender Equality is Both an End in Itself, and a Means to an End

An End in Itself...

- Gender equality is a basic **human rights issue**. Human rights are the rights that are inherent to all human beings, or innate to being human. These rights do not need to be granted by the state to exist. Internationally, the key embodiment of general (non-gender specific) human rights is the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the UN in 1948.

- The idea that women are equal to men and that they should enjoy the same rights may seem obvious to many in today's world, but human rights often need explicit protection and promotion by law to be realized. In 1981, the UN established the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), officially linking gender equality to the international human rights agenda. It was left to individual countries to pass the laws necessary to put this moral obligation into force.

A Means to an End...

Gender equality is about more than morality and the inviolability of human rights; it is also a means to other critical ends. New research is proving that powerful and meaningful economic and social change occurs when women, and girls, have the opportunity to participate equally in their societies. This creates a **ripple effect** beyond women's own well-being, and provides a powerful anti-poverty mechanism, public health tool, and a catalyst for general security in society at large. It is a way to realize the potential of half the world's population and bring their productivity and talents to bear on the world's most pressing problems.

A 2008 report prepared by the Center for Global Development, Girls Count, a Global Investment & Action Agenda, notes that gender equality is linked to better outcomes for societies in the following ways:

- **Gender Equality in Education Creates Involved Citizenry and Strong Governance.** Educated women are more likely to participate in civic life and to advocate for community improvements. Girls' schooling and social inclusion prepare young women to participate actively in civic life, a key component of improved governance. In India, for example, the quality of health services improved as women's education levels increased thanks to women's informed demands and the pressure they put on local services. A study in 2000 by UNESCO showed that educated women in Bangladesh are three times more likely to participate in political meetings than are illiterate women.
- **Gender Equality Leads to Economic Growth.** One of the best-documented relationships is between the education afforded to girls and their future economic activity. The World Bank has estimated that every year of primary school boosts a girl's eventual wages by 10-20%; an extra year of secondary school is associated with 15-25% increases in wages. Girls with more schooling participate in greater numbers in the labor force when they grow up, and they are able to earn more for their families and society. Even beyond labor force participation and productivity, fair access to education and employment for women leads to **lower rates of childbearing**. As childbearing declines, income per capita increases, rates of saving go up, and economies can expand.
- **Better Health and Education of Girls Today Equals Same for the Next Generation.** The research has borne out that the benefits of investing in girls are amplified and sustained in the next generation. Women in the developing world have been shown to reinvest 90% of their earnings in their families, compared with men who reinvest 30-40% of their wages in their families. Children's health is strongly correlated with mother's schooling – a relationship found consistently throughout the world and over time. Further, children's level of education closely follows their mother's level of education.
- **Empowering Women Can Lead to Better Distribution of Resources.** This has been shown to hold true at the family, community, and national level. From household budgeting to national budgets and the provision of development aid, empowering women as decision-makers is linked with more

efficient use of resources. Women not only use resources differently, but as primary providers, they are more in touch with material needs and effective ways of delivering goods and services.

The Path to Gender Equality

To realize its benefits, gender equality must be more than words on paper. It requires **accountability**. Accountability is achieved by moving gender relations out of the private realm and into the public. This can be through laws prohibiting discrimination and creating avenues for addressing violations. It can be in the form of quotas for the representation of women in decision-making bodies, or in “gender mainstreaming” or “gender budgeting” that take into account the special needs of women. It can be in the form of gender aid markers where development aid is tagged for specific gender-related programs and impact. These legal and procedural mechanisms can be on the international, national, and local level.

Accountability depends not only on the existence of laws and policies, but on their implementation as well. Realization of women's rights often depends on the values and attitudes of people in positions of power – from the police who investigate domestic violence to judges who decide cases to the average person who sits on a jury. Individuals and organizations must not only be prohibited from interfering with women's rights, but must accept a positive responsibility to proactively promote these rights.

And, finally, much gender inequality is out of the reach of the law – it is in assumptions, subtle stereotyping, cultural messages, and family practices. It is embedded in “business as usual” in government and the private sector alike. This is perhaps the most difficult realm to address, yet it affects all other avenues to gender equality.

The Beijing Declaration 12 Critical Areas of Concern

Women and the Economy

Women and Poverty

Women in Power and Decision-Making

Women and Education

Women and Health

Violence Against Women

Women in Armed Conflict

The Girl Child

Women and the Environment

Women and the Media

Women and Human Rights

Institutional Mechanisms

Women and the Economy

- Women and the Economy: Overview
 - Unpaid Work
 - Paid Work
- Employment Segregation in Paid Employment
 - The Wage Gap in Paid Employment
- How Countries Stack Up – Measuring Gender Inequality in the Economy
 - Why Gender Inequality in the Economy?
 - Has Globalization Been Good for Women?
 - The Concept of Decent Work
- How is the Current Global Economic Crisis Expected to Affect Women
 - Microfinance and Women – Grameen Bank

Women and the Economy: Overview

Women's participation in the economy occurs on multiple levels: household, community, country, and international.

A woman's economic empowerment is central to her empowerment politically, socially, and culturally.

Worldwide, women face legal economic gender discrimination, obstacles in hiring and management, and adverse social and cultural perceptions and traditions.

Division of labor by gender is an age-old practice, and is not inherently discriminatory.

- In practice, what makes division of labor unequal is when women are denied choices or control over their work and when their work is valued differently than men's. This is currently the case, in varying degrees, in every modern economy.
- It is generally accepted that in no society in the world do women enjoy complete gender equality in the area of employment.
- When unpaid as well as informal and formal paid labor is counted, **women everywhere work more total hours than men.** The trend begins early in life in the discrepancy between girls and boys. The only exception shown by expert Joni Seager appears to be in the Netherlands, where men work 10% more than women.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Women and the Economy

Unpaid Work

All women, whether or not they also work in the paid sector, contribute more hours than men in what is known as the “care economy.”

- The UN defines the “care economy” as “unpaid work done in the domestic sphere that keeps the current labor force fed, clothed, and healthy enough to work as well as raises the future labor force.”
- Also called “invisible work,” or the “second shift,” this includes childrearing, child and elder care, housework, and subsistence farming.
- The UN estimates that women spend an average of 70% of their time on work for which they do not get paid.
- If these services were not being performed for free by women, they would require public and private expenditures.

Housework – Hours Per Week

Country	Women	Men
United States	27	16
Switzerland	33	24
Japan	29	4
Developing Countries	31-42	5-15

Paid Work

Women participate in the paid economy by doing both formal and informal paid work.

Formal Paid Work

The formal employment sector comprises hourly and salaried workers by whom taxes are paid, and therefore whose statistics can be tracked through known channels (government and industry agencies). Official employment statistics from the International Labor Organization (2003) presented below are presumed to underestimate the extent to which women participate in the paid economy because different countries capture formal and informal employment differently:

Region	% of Women With Paying Jobs
Africa	58%
Asia	64%
Latin America and Caribbean	46%
Europe	69%
North America	73%
Arab World	35%

Two critical issues that women face in the formal labor sector are employment segregation and the wage gap.

Informal Paid Work

Women are overrepresented in the informal employment sector.

- These are jobs that are often “off the books,” contractual, seasonal, and/or casual in nature, and typically come with no benefits such as health insurance, disability, or retirement.
- Unregulated by safety codes or unions, these jobs tend to be in the realm of the 3 Ds (dirty, dangerous, dull), and include street trade, domestic services, cleaning, caregiving, food preparation, and prostitution.
- Workers in the informal economy (men and women) find themselves highly vulnerable to economic swings and to the whims of their employers. Exploitation of workers is common.

Employment Segregation in Paid Employment

Employment segregation refers to the overrepresentation of women in certain types of jobs (and their underrepresentation in others). **Segregation can be:**

- **Horizontal** – This means by sector, or by occupation. Women tend to be overrepresented in public sector jobs, particularly in education and social services. They also tend to dominate agricultural jobs (producing between 50 and 80% of the world’s food), and assembly line manufacturing jobs. They are underrepresented in industry and finance.
- **Vertical** – This refers to hierarchies within occupations. Women are more likely to hold jobs at the lower rung of the ladder in all professions; they are underrepresented in middle management and vastly underrepresented in leadership positions. UNIFEM estimates that men are five times as likely as women to hold managerial positions. Only 15% of U.S. Fortune 500 companies’ board members are women; only 11% of the directors of the top companies in the U.K. are women.
- **Formal** – Established and perpetuated by laws, legal practices, and organizational guidelines (de jure discrimination).
- **Informal** – Dictated by gender norms, stereotypes, traditions, and organizational practices (de facto discrimination).

Employment segregation, when it exists, is almost always:

- A combination of blatant/outright and more subtle discrimination.
- Linked to lack of educational opportunities, professional development, and networking that channel women along certain “tracks.”
- Associated with a lack of recruiting, mentoring and role models in certain jobs and, as such, tends to be self-perpetuating.

Women experiencing de jure and de facto discrimination are said to be subjected to the “**sticky floor**” and “**glass ceiling**.”

The Wage Gap in Paid Employment

All over the world, women are paid less than men, earning an average of **75 cents on every dollar earned by men**.

Cents on the dollar add up, creating a disparity of thousands of dollars in annual earnings.

In the United States, this is also impacted by race, with white women earning 74 cents, African-American women 64 cents, and Latino American women 52 cents on the equivalent male dollar. Experts note that this gap has only improved by one-half of one cent over the last 40 years, even as the U.S. economy has expanded.

Why is there a Wage Gap?

The phenomenon of unequal pay has three main contributing factors:

- **Vertical and horizontal employment discrimination** – Women tend to be clustered in lower-status, lower-paying jobs and positions (see above).
- **Part time work** – Women are more likely to work part-time, and part-time jobs not only add up to fewer paid hours, but are also typically less lucrative (especially with regard to benefits) and more vulnerable. Women make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of all part-time workers in the world, and are often subjected to the “last hired, first fired” nature of part-time employment. The decision to work part time is not always voluntary, as women balance responsibilities in the “care economy” and wage economy; the decision is often linked to

child care and maternity leave policies in different countries.

- **Outright discrimination** – In some cases, wage discrimination is blatant and procedural, resulting in unequal pay for equal work. The reasons for this include cultural values and the assumption that women are not the primary breadwinner in a family. Women often lack both information and negotiating power to address wage discrimination. They often are unaware that they are being underpaid.

It is important to note that **laws are only useful in addressing outright discrimination**, and even then, access to legal channels is often limited. (Although several recent high profile class action lawsuits have forced global employers such as Wal-Mart to modify their compensation practices.)

- Most women who experience the wage gap do so because of larger structural employment and economic factors, subtle exclusion from networking and professional development, and gender stereotyping.
- In many cases, relative lack of resources, education, training, and opportunities collide with family responsibilities to limit upward mobility and contribute to underemployment.

Experts note that closing the wage gap not only improves women's economic well-being, but is **good for the overall economy as well**. For example, World Economic Forum research has shown that simply eliminating gender inequality in the labor market in Latin America would increase national output growth by 5%.

How Countries Stack Up – Measuring Gender Inequality in the Economy

Social Watch, a project of The Third World Institute, which is a global coalition of citizen watchdog NGO's, has developed a Gender Equity Index (GEI). This measure is an analysis of three spheres defined as Education, Economic Activity, and Empowerment, with all measures for all three spheres being combined into a single quantitative measurement that gives insight into the "gender gap" within a nation.

- The 2008 GEI reveals that the economic "gender gap" is increasing worldwide as **progress made in some**

countries is more than balanced by regression in others.

- Contrary to popular belief, **overall economic development of a country is not a factor in determining gender equality in employment.**
- The top scoring countries on the 2008 Social Watch GEI scale include rich and poor nations alike. The top four nations on the list are Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Germany – these nations typically lead most indices of gender equality. They are followed by Rwanda, the Bahamas, and Denmark.
- The United States, with a GEI of 75, is in company with the nations of Kazakhstan, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. These countries rank behind such nations as the Philippines, Latvia, and the Netherlands.
- The worst performing countries on this measure are Yemen, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo.

Why Gender Inequality in the Economy?

Why are women more likely to be unpaid, underpaid, and underemployed? The reasons can be summed up in five broad categories:

Capacity

Worldwide, compared with men, women often **lack the education and skills necessary to gain employment in more lucrative sectors and to experience upward mobility once there.**

- Fewer girls than boys are enrolled in primary school; of those who are enrolled, enrollment does not guarantee attendance. Girls are less likely to be enrolled, and much more likely to attend irregularly or not at all, or to drop out. (See Education section for the reasons for this.)
- When a gender gap exists in primary education enrollment, it widens dramatically when it comes to secondary and higher education. In addition, more boys than girls enter educational tracks geared toward science and technology.
- Girls and women are vastly overrepresented among the world's illiterate.

- Women are less likely to receive professional or vocational training once employed, significantly limiting their chances at promotion and success. This is especially true with respect to technology. In the developing world, women's lack of access to agricultural extension training (making use of innovations in farming) is a primary reason for the failure of female-headed farms and a factor in famines.
- Even when resources are made available to women in the form of microcredit and help with starting small businesses, business management practices are not generally taught. Most women-owned microenterprises do not experience growth beyond subsistence-level.

Access to Resources

- Women typically lack access to resources necessary to start and grow businesses.
- Divorce, inheritance, and land laws often discriminate against women and girls, robbing them of valuable capital and property.
- It is estimated that although women are responsible for growing up to 90% of food in Africa, they own only about 1% of the land. In South America, women comprise less than one-third of landowners, ranging from 11% in Brazil to 30% in Paraguay.
- Without capital, women are often unable to obtain credit, an absolute necessity of business transactions. Less than 10% of credit in the world is extended to women.
- Microfinance organizations are rushing to fill this void, in developed and developing countries alike, with organizations like the Grameen Bank prioritizing women entrepreneurs.

Decision-Making

- Women often lack what is known as **agency**, or the ability to act as their own agents of change and improvement.
- From the family home to the board room to unions to governments and NGOs trying to help them, women are often under-represented in positions of power and influence, and are less likely to be able to effectively pursue and protect their interests. One area in which

women are vastly underrepresented is also one that impacts their economic well-being more than many realize: the making of national and international trade policies.

- Women also often lack access to informal channels of power and influence. Think of the jobs and connections that result from male participation in fraternities, sports teams, and clubs, or the preferences are often given in family businesses.
- This lack of leverage in decision-making is both a cause and a symptom of lower economic, cultural, social, and/or political status. A cycle results.

Time Use and Household Responsibilities

- As mentioned above, women are generally responsible for the majority of unpaid work associated with care of the home, children, and the elderly. Time use logs document this fact, which is missing from official employment statistics.
- Household responsibilities thus take away from the time women have to spend in paid employment, whether full-time or part-time. This diminishes female earning power and economic status.

Norms and Stereotypes

- Even when laws prevent official employment discrimination and affirmative action programs facilitate the participation of women in a diverse range of jobs, gender inequality may still result from cultural norms, stereotypes, and traditions.
- Economic activity cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which it occurs – from families to communities. Values and attitudes shape both hiring and job-seeking; choices are made by men and women alike that serve to economically marginalize many women. This runs the spectrum, from Muslim women who are not permitted to leave the house to Western women who strive to balance traditional motherhood with work.

Has Globalization Been Good For Women?

Globalization refers to “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets.” (Merriam-Webster)

In some ways, **globalization has been good for women.**

- The rise of **Export Processing Zones (EPZs)** in developing countries has created millions of jobs which women now fill. Part of the “global supply chain,” these manufacturing jobs require little education and training, and are well-suited to women seeking both short-term and long-term work. Examples include factory work in the garment, footwear, and small electronics industries. In this way, globalization has contributed to the rising percentages of women in non-agricultural jobs worldwide, and has helped to lift millions out of abject poverty.
- Enhanced technology and communication has also reduced the isolation of women worldwide, raising awareness and facilitating the rise of a new wave of feminist solidarity and self-help.
- Improved transportation and mobility has also benefited women who are, in ever increasing numbers, leaving rural areas and finding work in urban centers. With this migration has come a measure of independence and self-sufficiency not previously known in many societies.

However, there are considerable **downsides to globalization for women.**

- While EPZs provide jobs for women, the **work can be less than desirable.** Intense international competition created by globalization has produced “a race to the bottom” in these global supply chains as manufacturers attempt to drive down the cost of inputs. Pay is low and conditions can be dangerous. With supply for these jobs often outstripping demand, the labor can be repetitive, and take place in sweatshop-like environments. Multinational corporations are often drawn to EPZs precisely because they offer a haven from government regulation of workplace environments. With up to 80% of the factory jobs in these areas filled by women, there are a lot of women exposed globally to potentially unsafe and unhealthy conditions.
- Women who move to export manufacturing centers are often **cut off from family support networks** and have difficulty finding child care and services otherwise provided by the community. In other cases,



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

- women are forced to leave children behind miles or oceans away.
- Turnover tends to be high in export-dominated jobs as work forces are contracted and expanded with global demand. Employment in EPZs is therefore extremely volatile with women bearing much of the brunt of the resulting insecurity.
- In economies geared toward the export of agricultural products – fruits, vegetables, cut flowers – land is often consolidated into large-scale industrial agriculture ventures. This emphasis on cash crops shrinks the land available for subsistence farming, on which many women in developing countries depend for their livelihood and that of their families. This consolidation can also degrade the land and diminish natural resources, making basic provisioning (finding food, firewood, and water) more difficult, less convenient, and more time-consuming.
- Globalization has contributed to pollution and climate change, both of which affect women differently than men. (See Health and Environment sections).
- Increased mobility and migration has led to **increased trafficking and smuggling** in slave labor and prostitution. The UN estimates that up to 800,000 people, mostly women and girls, are trafficked across international borders. More are thought to be trafficked within countries, and numerous others go uncounted.
- Women far from home or seeking employment in other countries are seen as particularly **vulnerable to exploitation**, and porous borders make enforcement of laws difficult. Men working and traveling in the global economy create demand for what is known as

“sexual tourism” that is filled by young women with few other options. Women who migrate to EPZs and then lose their factory jobs, and those who are lured to migrate under false pretenses by traffickers, are especially affected.

- Experts note that labor and social policies are generally determined at the national level, while work is now increasingly international and cross-border. This is a fundamental problem of concern to the International Labor Organization (ILO), and is seen as one of the primary reasons why globalization may be exacerbating inequalities in societies.

The Concept of Decent Work

It is important to note that men do suffer from many of the same ills of globalization and the evolution of work in the modern world economy. **To address women’s employment issues, many experts advocate for a larger reevaluation and reform of work for everyone.** The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines “decent work” as:

Productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage are provided.

Most agree that best practices in employment extend past the workplace (into the social realm mentioned above). **Of particular concern here is the issue of child care.** In the United States, two-thirds of women with children under the age of six work outside the home; three-quarters of women with school-age children work. The cost and quality of child care impacts the entire family, men as well as women, although it is a disproportionate burden to female-headed households. Child care as well as family and sick leave policies are seen as part of the solution.

How is the Current Economic Crisis Expected to Affect Women?

- With decreased demand for goods and services worldwide, unemployment is expected to hit men and women alike. Yet **women make up the majority of the flexible workforce** (relatively unskilled, hourly), and these jobs are usually the first to go.
- While men employed in traditionally male sectors (transport, communications, and mining) have

been hit hard by job cuts in the early months of the recession, experts predict the next wave of cuts will likely come in the public sector, dominated by women.

- As tax revenues decline and governments fall on hard times, budget-cutting will affect fields like education, health care, and other public services, creating a gap in societies that women will then likely fill through unpaid work. This will affect women in rich and poor countries alike.
- In many developing countries, **remittances** from migrant workers living abroad sustain entire families left behind. As workers all over the world lose jobs, remittances may dry up and plunge whole communities into extreme poverty. This will affect women as the primary provisioners and caretakers in families.
- It has been noted that government stimulus packages designed to mitigate the present crisis often contain large expenditures on infrastructure (roads, bridges). While these projects, when completed, should help women, the jobs that are created in short-term will largely be filled by men who dominate the construction industries. Studies done by the U.S. Conference of Mayors show that “green jobs” are also predominately male; by some accounts women are expected to fill only 12% of these new employment opportunities.

Is there a **Silver Lining**?

- With crisis often comes **opportunity**. With the global economy in chaos, the rules of the game may be rewritten. Although, as Shalini Nataraj and Muadi Mukenge of the GFW have noted, this window may be closing as more attention is focused on shoring up and bailing out the current system, rather than re-examining it.
- At the very least, as men lose jobs all over the world, traditional family structures and workplace assumptions are being upended. Many women are now the primary breadwinner in households, with their husbands picking up more responsibility in the unpaid “care economy.”

Microfinance and Women – Grameen Bank

The practice of modern day microfinance is generally attributed as having originated with Muhammad Yunus and the founding of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in the mid-1970s.

Traditionally, banks have not given loans to individuals who had little to no net worth since there would be no collateral to lay down as a guarantee for the loan. Even if an individual in a poorer nation owned land which could be considered an asset for collateral, these nations often have poor or ineffective legal systems that can prove and guarantee title to that land. Without that guarantee system, banks have not provided access to credit capital (a business loan) that could help a poor person with a business idea grow and develop a business that might help him out of poverty.

Moreover, banks traditionally would not give out very small loans. If the operating costs of managing a single loan was greater than the loan itself, then the banks would have no way of making money on those loans. This lack of access has kept many poor people around the world nearly solely dependent upon bare subsistence farming and handouts from government or international agency programs.

Microfinance provides for these conditions by not requiring collateral to receive a loan and by granting loans as small as \$1.00 U.S. dollar. Microfinance functions best by operating through **solidarity lending**. Solidarity lending groups borrowers into small groups of five people. Although none of the individuals act as co-signers or guarantors of each others' loans, there are rules as to when each successive borrower can get their loan, based on the payback schedules of the other borrowers in the group.

Microfinance is now practiced in over 40 different countries. While a practice targeted and developed for the poorest of the poor, it was eventually exported to developed nations, including the United States. In developed nations, commercial banks and credit unions did not have a system to make loans to those without means of collateral. But that changed as several banks joined forces with government agencies to create community lending practices for poor rural and inner-city urban residents using the same practices as microfinance institution operating in poor nations.



Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank.

From the experience attained over the last three decades of economic development and lending practices, microfinance experts have concluded that women should be the primary targets of this practice. Women are far less likely than men to default on their loans and far more likely to develop businesses that have impact on their entire family and community.

One of the latest innovations to occur in modern microfinance has been the ability of individuals to provide credit capital directly to microfinance borrowers. Organizations like Kiva, Wokai, and numerous others have created direct lending pathways, mostly facilitated through the Internet, allowing private individuals to contribute to a loan for a borrower in another country. These loans, however, are not guaranteed through any government regulated agencies and individuals take on the risks for default.

A second innovation in the world of microfinance has been the transition of formerly not-for-profit lending institutions into for-profit entities. Since the practice has proven itself lucrative, many lending organizations have wanted to access greater amounts of investment capital by becoming for-profit organizations. A 2008 report by Women's World Banking, however, showed this transition to have resulted in a decreased lending rate to women.

Women and Poverty

Women and Poverty: Overview
Factors Contributing to the Feminization of Poverty in Developing Countries
Women and Anti-Poverty Efforts in Developing Countries
The Millennium Development Goals
Microfinance

Women and Poverty: Overview

Approximately 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty in the world, subsisting on less than \$1 per day. **Nearly all live in the developing world, and a full 70% are women and girls.**

Not only are women overrepresented among the world's poor, but it is also thought that they experience poverty differently, and often more acutely, than men.

- In least developed countries (LDCs), infrastructure for providing energy, water, and food is lacking; providing for these basic needs often falls to women.
- In developing countries, poor women lack access to education, land, capital, and adequate health care.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Women and Poverty

Factors Contributing to the Feminization of Poverty in Developing Countries

Patriarchal Traditions and Colonialism

- Anthropologically, not all developing countries have a patriarchal history. In fact, some ancient and indigenous communities contained powerful matriarchal features. Others were clearly dominated by patriarchal customs.
- For poor countries that were once colonies of European powers, colonialism imposed rules and norms that largely favored males because European societies in the era of imperialism were largely patriarchal themselves. Economic, political, and cultural practices and structures disadvantaged women and either began or perpetuated a cycle of gender inequality whose legacy persists to this day.

Modernization and Globalization

- As industry has advanced, agriculture has become more commercialized. Economies in developed countries have moved toward production for export rather than domestic consumption, which in some cases has resulted in less land and water available for women who depend on subsistence farming and/or fishing to provide for their families.
- In these situations, women who farm small plots of land to feed their families have found that there is now less arable land; for women who fish in local waters, the waters may have become overfished.

Structural Adjustment Programs

Experts also point to international finance mechanisms known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) as exacerbating women's poverty in developing countries. Although SAPs were designed to help heavily indebted countries by rapidly transitioning their economies to free market systems dominated by export industries, the process was often painful in the short and mid-term.

SAPs required that countries slash public spending and eliminate public sector jobs as conditions of debt restructuring and loan forgiveness by international bodies such as the IMF and World Bank.

- As public services declined, the burden fell disproportionately on women to fill the resulting gaps.
- As energy was diverted from domestic concerns to export production, basic provisioning became more difficult for women.
- As corruption seeped into privatization schemes, male-dominated oligarchies often formed because men were the only ones with the capital to take advantage of rapid free market transitions. The free market often benefits those who are best positioned to reap its rewards; in most cases, these beneficiaries were not initially women.

How Countries Stack Up: The GDI

The GDI or Gender-Related Development Index is a measurement calculated by the UN Development Programme to capture the **disparity in achievement between men and women within the larger Human Development Index or HDI**.

- Four factors are considered: relative life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rates, combined gross enrollment rates for all levels of education, and estimated earned income for men and women. Lower GDI scores indicate less inequality.
- The ten countries performing best on GDI rank include the Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands), along with Australia, Canada, Switzerland, France, and the United Kingdom. The United States finishes 16th out of 157 countries.
- The 10 countries with the worst GDI rank are all in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Preliminary data on 2008 figures, included in a recent Statistical Update to the GDI, shed even more light on gender inequalities, including a ranking of how countries fare when their overall Human Development Index scores are compared to their Gender-Related Development Scores.

- Sweden tops the list in achievements of women relative to its overall development levels.
- Interestingly, the U.S.'s rank drops to 106th out of 157 when women's development in America is considered as a percentage of overall development.

Women and Anti-Poverty Efforts in Developing Countries

Trends

In the wake of collateral damage to women inflicted by SAPs, and as research mounted on the disproportionate effects of poverty on women in LDCs, developed countries and international finance institutions moved to include special **gender budgeting** in their aid programs.

- More attention and money was directed toward women as part of a Women and Development (WAD) movement in the 1980s.

- Yet, many women's advocates and development experts found this approach to be often patronizing. Instead of directing money at women as victims of poverty, many felt that women should be empowered as agents of their own improvement – in their families, communities, and countries.
- By the 1990s, the prevailing wisdom accepted that women should be given economic and political opportunities to chart their own course toward development. This came to be known as the Gender and Development (GAD) movement, and its strategies and tactics dominate the field of development assistance and anti-poverty efforts today.

Beyond Gendered Poverty: Helping Women as a Societal Investment

The last few decades have seen an explosion of research indicating that development dollars spent on women yield higher returns than those spent on men.

- Women are more likely than men to use development assistance to benefit their children and families, increasing the intergenerational return on investments. The World Bank has found that increasing women's well-being correlates with better probability that their children will go to school and enjoy good health than if extra income had been provided to fathers.
- Women are considered more productive than men and better stewards of land in small scale farming ventures, an important indicator in a world still wracked by famines. They are thought to make excellent use of agricultural extension training and loans when they are made available. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has shown that giving women farmers in Kenya the same level of agricultural assistance as men could increase yields of farmers by more than 20%.
- Even enhanced gender equality in decision-making in household consumption and production dynamics makes a difference. The Food Policy Research Institute has estimated that if family decision-making was equalized, nearly two million more children in Sub-Saharan Africa would be adequately nourished.
- Money spent on education yields differential returns as well. Everything else being equal, the WEF has shown that countries where the rates of enrollment

of girls in school is less than 75% that of enrollment rates of boys can expect to have a GDP roughly 25% less than that of countries where less gender disparity exists in education.

- Educated women not only have enhanced economic opportunities, but educated women also are likely to have fewer children than non-educated women and to invest better in the children they do have. This is of immense importance in a world where high fertility rates correlate dramatically with high poverty rates.

The United Nations Development Program Gender Equality Strategy

In short, not only women, but entire communities and countries benefit from gender equality. Reflecting this reality, a centerpiece of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is its Gender Equality Strategy:

- The UNDP Gender Equality Strategy is grounded in the premise that the development objective of equality between men and women, or gender equality, is absolutely indivisible from the UNDP human development goal of real improvements in people's lives and in the choices and opportunities open to them. By empowering women to claim their internationally-agreed rights in every development sphere, and supporting governments to be both proactive and responsive in advancing the realization of these rights, UNDP will leverage the broadest possible expansion of choice and opportunity for all.

The Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight key objectives related to development that provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the most pressing issues of poverty in the world today. Developed through collaboration at the local, national, and international levels and incorporating public and private expertise, the MDGs contain benchmarks for eradicating poverty by the year 2015. See Key Foundation Documents.

The MDGs tackle the feminization of poverty in several ways.

- Most prominent is MDG #3 – Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

- Two others explicitly target women's issues – #2 Achieve Universal Primary Education and #5 Improve Maternal Health.
- As primary caregivers, women are implicitly targeted in #4 – Reduce Child Mortality.
- As a population disproportionately suffering from poor health, women are also targeted in #6 – Combat HIV/Aids, Malaria, and Other Diseases.
- The other three MDGs (Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger, Ensure Environmental Sustainability, and Develop a Global Partnership for Development) contain provisions for addressing women's unique experience of poverty and role in combating its causes and symptoms.

As the current global economic crisis continues, most experts fear there will be not only a halt to progress, but a regression in some of the MDGs.

Microfinance

As mentioned in the previous section on Women and the Economy, one of the main barriers to women's economic empowerment is **lack of access to capital**. This is particularly true in developing countries where land ownership and family law favors men. Women often cannot get title to family land; inherited land or money tends to go to brothers or directly to women's husbands. Not only does this make women's financial situations insecure, but it also means they have no collateral with which to obtain credit – a critical underpinning of any entrepreneurial activity.

Microfinance, as illustrated by the activities of the Grameen Bank, attempts to address this critical shortcoming at the heart of gendered poverty. Grameen's model is now replicated in many other microfinance institutions.

Overall, the results for women have been impressive and have added to the body of research indicating that women who are given the necessary tools are often more effective agents of family, community, and national development than men.

- Microfinance, also known as microcredit and microlending, provides banking services to people whom the banking industry typically does not reach – people who are risky borrowers because they lack

collateral and people who are not as profitable to the lending institution because they seek small loans.

- Grameen's specialty is loans to poor women, who comprise 97% of its 7.56 million total borrowers. A local community of borrowers is established with clear guidelines on how loans are to be used, and the community is responsible for repayment. Employing peer pressure and sense of communal purpose is the innovation that is at the heart of Grameen's 98% repayment rate.
- Studies show that 65% of Grameen's female clients have clearly improved their socio-economic conditions.

Women's microfinance institutions have proliferated, though some believe that their success has been overstated.

- Skeptics point to studies that show while microcredit has helped women to lift themselves and their families out of poverty, few of the loans have contributed to the growth of larger female-owned businesses. Few entrepreneurial ventures started by women using microcredit employ other people or grow to be engines of job creation. Even in the U.S., Lisa Belkin of the New York Times has reported, women start businesses at twice the rate of men, yet 70% of them fail to grow revenues beyond \$50,000 per year.

Experts within the development field generally agree that microfinance alone will not solve the problem of poverty – female or otherwise. It must be combined with systemic approaches to address the larger burdens that fall on entrepreneurially-inclined women. The bottom line is that, even if a woman has access to credit and has a superlative work ethic, lack of development generally in her country will hamstring her success.

Consider the time use dilemma of women living in poor countries – hours spent looking for firewood, traveling to water sources along bad roads, caring for children and the elderly, and time lost to poor health will diminish a woman's productivity. Lack of access to education and training will limit her economic growth. To significantly promote women's economic empowerment, therefore, macro strategies must complement micro strategies.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

Women in Power and Decision-Making: Overview
Political Power
What Impacts Gender Parity in Politics?
What Mechanisms Exist to Promote Women's Participation in Politics?
Gender Empowerment Measure
Rwanda's Women – Leading the Way

Women In Power and Decision-Making: Overview

Nearly all experts agree that efforts to address any of the other 11 Areas of Critical Concern to women cannot succeed until women achieve parity in positions of power, leadership, and influence within those areas of concern and in the world generally.

Formal power through political participation is one crucial way in which women can affect their own destinies. As with economic empowerment, women's access to decision-making positions, political and otherwise, has profound implications not only for gender justice, but for the well-being of entire societies as their talents are brought to bear for the larger good.

Women are seen by some experts as possessing traits that lend themselves to quality leadership, such as a proclivity for consensus building and less corrupt behavior. However, women seeking leadership roles face significant logistical and financial hurdles. Gender stereotypes play a role as well. Those who make it to positions of great influence are said by Nicholas Kristof to face "a trade off in qualities associated with top leadership. A woman can be perceived as competent or likable, but not both."



The 16 female Senators of the 110th US Congress.

Women In Power and Decision-Making

Political Power

There are two important ways in which political power is exercised in democratic societies: voting and office-holding. The ultimate measure of political empowerment, many would say, is the achievement of high office, particularly that of Head of State. Beyond national and local politics lies office-holding in the realm of international institutions, such as the United Nations.

Suffrage

Suffrage refers to the legal right to vote, **a privilege that historically has been extended to male citizens before female**. In many societies, women have gained this right in phases (as have men in many cases) based on ethnicity and other qualifiers such as ownership of property.

- The first country to extend voting rights to women was New Zealand in the 1890s.
- The Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and The Netherlands) led the way, granting equal voting rights in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Russia, Canada, Australia, and Germany followed in this first wave.
- The period from 1920 through the Second World War was marked by the extension of suffrage to women in the U.K., U.S., and most of Europe.
- The post-WWII period brought suffrage to women in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The most recent country to grant women the vote was Kuwait, in 2005.

Women still may not vote in Saudi Arabia, with the recent exception of some elections at the municipal level.

- Today, most countries allow women to vote. There are still countries where monarchies rule, however, and both men and women are disenfranchised.

Suffrage is only one part of the equation. Beyond possessing the legal right to vote, **women must also be able to fully exercise this right**.

- In the United States, all women were given the right to vote in 1920. However, most black women (like black men) were prevented from actually casting ballots throughout the American South until the Voting Rights Act of 1964 ended racial discrimination at the ballot box.
- In other countries, regimes have been known to prevent women from either registering or going to the polls through intimidation, cultural restrictions, and inconvenience.
- In some countries, such as Lebanon, women must pass competence tests not required of men in order to cast their vote.
- Women who have both the legal right to vote and are able to access the ballot box may still be disenfranchised by their inability to read and understand candidate platforms, election issues, and pending legislation. Their votes may be unduly influenced by their husbands or fathers.

- Fundamentally, the vote is only a tool of empowerment if it is wielded with independence and full comprehension of the implications of the choices offered.

Finally, **the vote is only good if it is used!**

- There are places where women possess the legal right, the access, and the capacity to influence the political process with their vote, but choose not to do so.
- In the United States, unmarried women represent the largest demographic that both under-registers and under-votes. In the closely-contested Presidential election of 2000, 22 million unmarried women did not cast a ballot.

Office-holding

The next level of political participation and power is office-holding – both elected and appointed, at the international, national, state, and local levels. **Women officeholders correlate with higher levels of legislation seen as beneficial to women; more women tend to vote if women candidates are running.**

- Sri Lanka was the first country to elect a female Prime Minister in 1960; Argentina was the first to elect a woman President in 1974.
- In 1999, Sweden became the first country where female Parliamentarians outnumbered men. In 2009, Monaco elected its first female Parliamentarian.
- In 2009, there are three women who are queens in their own right (Denmark, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom).
- There are currently eight female Presidents (Argentina, Chile, Finland, India, Ireland, Liberia, the Philippines, and San Marino).
- There are nine women Prime Ministers (Bangladesh, Germany, Haiti, Ireland, Moldova, Mozambique, The Netherlands-Antilles, Ukraine, and Aland Islands).
- Women who came close to becoming Head of State in recent years include Hillary Clinton (U.S.) and Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan). Both women represent a historical trend of female leaders who are associated with powerful male predecessors in the form of husbands or fathers. Others have included Isabel Peron (Argentina), Indira Gandhi (India – daughter

of Jawaharlal Nehru, not Mahatma Gandhi), and Nancy Pelosi (Speaker of the House – U.S.).

The Beijing Declaration sets out a **goal of 30% for female representation in government.**

- Only 19 out of 192 countries currently meet that goal. The United States is not one of them at 15% female representation. The U.S. lags behind much of the world in the percentage of cabinet posts held by women.
- Worldwide, 18% of government positions are filled by women. This is up from 10% in 1980 and 11% in 1995. Unifem has estimated that at the current rate of growth, it will take until the year 2045 for women to reach parity.
- The countries with the most female participation in office-holding are the Nordic countries, Rwanda, and Argentina. Rwanda currently leads the world with the highest percentage of female Parliamentarians.
- Countries with low percentages of female government officials can be found throughout the Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa, and in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, and Haiti.
- Women are more likely to hold cabinet positions in fields such as education, culture, and the arts, and less likely to hold positions related to defense or finance and budget.

What Impacts Progress Toward Gender Parity in Politics?

- The Fawcett Society of the U.K. cites four key issues facing women who seek political office: culture, child care, cash, and confidence.
- Gender stereotyping plays an important role. Politics is often not seen as a suitable realm for women. This is especially true in traditional societies, but in modern societies as well, where men tend to be less accepting of female candidates and women often are less likely to aspire to political office.
- The Goldberg Paradigm, described recently by Nicholas Kristof in the *New York Times*, holds that when people are read a speech or article and told variably that they are the words of a man or those of a woman, “typically, in countries all over the world,

the very same words are rated higher coming from a man.”

- With the cost of elections running into the millions and hundreds of millions of dollars in some countries (especially the U.S., where there is little public financing of campaigns), political success is overwhelmingly linked to economic power.
- Women are also seen as being disadvantaged by current “feeder systems” into politics. They are less likely to hold lower or local elected office, which feeds into higher or national office. They are less likely to hold positions of power in corporations where many appointed officials begin their careers.

What Mechanisms Exist to Promote the Participation of Women in Politics?

Because of the barriers discussed above, most experts agree that **efforts to improve gender parity in politics require affirmative action** of some kind.

- The single greatest factor influencing the number of female officeholders is the existence of quota systems where a certain number of seats are set aside for women. This is how post-genocide Rwanda has achieved its leading percentage.
- Another factor correlated with gender equality in politics is election law. Countries that have a “winner take-all” or “first past the post” system whereby offices are rewarded to the party that takes the majority of the vote tend to put fewer women in office. Systems where offices are awarded proportionally according to the percentage of votes gained tend to have more women.
- There is the realization that female candidates require extra support – with raising money, training and capacity-building, community organizing, and campaign management. Many NGOs and advocacy organizations now exist to provide this. EMILY’s List in the United States is an example. EMILY stands for Early Money is Like Yeast.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) do include a goal specific to gender equality (#3 – Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women). Unlike the Beijing Declaration, however, the MDGs do not include formal targets for female representation in politics, an omission

that many believe hampers progress toward closing what Social Watch has called the “empowerment gap.”

Gender Empowerment Measure

The United Nations employs a special calculation to measure women’s political participation and decision-making power, economic participation, and command over resources. This is known as the Gender Empowerment Measure or GEM.

- The GEM takes into account: the percent of parliamentary seats held by women; the percent of legislators, senior officials, and managers who are women; the percent of professional and technical workers who are women; and the ratio of estimated female to male earned income.
- Again, the pack is led by the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and the Netherlands), followed by Belgium, Australia, Germany, and Canada.
- The United States ranks 15th out of 93 countries for which data is available.
- Those countries ranking the most poorly are in South Asia and the Middle East.

Rwanda’s Women – Leading the Way

“Committed to ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development”

- Rwandan Constitution

For most people, Rwanda brings to mind the horrifying genocide that occurred in 1994. Today, Rwanda can be seen as a leader in **gender parity in government**. In 2008, women were elected to 56% of the seats in Parliament, making it the world leader in female democratic representation.

This dramatic milestone is no coincidence. Many post-conflict countries, especially those moving from authoritarian to democratic forms of governance, are increasing female political leadership by setting **quotas for elected offices**. This strategy has been used in some other post-conflict countries as well, such as Algeria, Iraq, South Africa, and East Timor.

Following the genocide in 1994, women and girls made up 70% of Rwanda's remaining total population. Women were forced to rebuild their families, communities, and country by becoming economic providers and civil society leaders. They have had to learn new skills and enter new fields of work, which in turn, has empowered them run for and get elected to offices of political leadership. When it was time for the transitional government to draft a new constitution in 2000, 3 of the 12 commission members were women. Strongly backed by the leadership of Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, the constitution includes a commitment to gender equality by ensuring women will hold at least 30% of posts in "decision-making organs."



A Rwandan woman sewing. Photo courtesy of Flickr user Robincd123/Robin.

Rwanda also created an electoral structure to support this commitment to female representation. The Senate is composed of 26 members, of whom 30% must be women. Senators gain seats either by election or presidential appointment. In the lower chamber of Parliament, 24 of the 80 seats are reserved for women, who run for office in women-only elections – that means that only women run, and only women can vote. These women-only elections are coordinated by grassroots women's councils. In the 2008 election, 45 of the available 80 seats went to women – 24 in women-only elections and 21 in openly contested elections!

Rwanda's female Parliamentarians have also joined together to form a women's caucus, working together regardless of party affiliation. By applying a lens of gender sensitivity to the Parliament, these women have reviewed existing laws and introduced amendments to discriminatory laws. One of their most significant achievements was the repeal in 1999 of laws that prevented women from inheriting land, thus paving the way for continued economic growth and freedom for Rwanda's women.

Women and Education

- Women and Education: Overview
 - Primary School
- The Transition from Primary to Secondary School
 - Tertiary or Higher Education
- Segregation in Fields of Study
- Literacy – The Bottom Line

Women and Education: Overview

Worldwide, policymakers and community leaders have recognized that women are the key to improving and maintaining any nation's development, let alone progress for all of humanity. Educating women resolves chronic impediments in health and the economy. Eradicating poverty as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) cannot be achieved without an investment in women, and that means educating girls.

- Education is a fundamental human right for all.
- Educated girls have more life choices as members of their community.
- Educated women are more likely to send their daughters to school.
- Educated women tend to marry later and have fewer children who are more likely to be better nourished and healthier.
- Educated women and girls are better able to protect themselves against preventable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.
- Educated women are a key factor in reducing poverty rates and improving overall community and social well-being.

More school-age girls than boys do not attend school. More girls than boys fail to finish school. More women than men are illiterate. Policymakers have outlined two key goals for closing this gender gap in education.

- **Gender parity**, or equalizing the number of girls and boys attending school, is one part of the solution. Gender parity has been reached in many regions, including much of Latin American and the Caribbean, some Arab states, and the Asia/Pacific region. In some countries, girls outnumber boys in school due to factors such as the traditional roles of minding livestock, but the overwhelming numbers still favor boys.
- **Gender equality** in education, however, means ensuring that once in school, girls and young women experience an environment that is conducive to their success and ability to achieve equality in society. That translates into schools that set and implement curricular goals that do not favor boys' achievement over that of girls, and that focus on meeting the needs of both genders equally.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

“By combining the right to education with rights within education, we can achieve rights through education.”

- United Nations Children’s Fund

Women and Education

Primary School

Substantial gains have been made over the past few decades worldwide in primary school enrollment, for boys and girls.

According to a 2004 UNICEF report:

- 83% of children attend primary school through 5th grade.
- 75% of school-age girls attend primary school, compared to 78% of boys.

Region	% primary school entrants reaching Grade 5	% of school-age Boys attending primary school	% of school-age Girls attending primary school
Sub-Saharan Africa	63%	63%	59%
Eastern & Southern Africa	71%	66%	66%
Western & Central Africa	55%	59%	52%
Middle East & North Africa	91%	83%	77%
South Asia	76%	81%	75%
East Asia & Pacific	94%	NA	NA
Latin America & the Caribbean	85%	89%	89%
Central & Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent states	96%	91%	89%

The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

There is a significant drop from primary school enrollment rates to secondary school enrollment, which is estimated to be 59% globally. Where a gender gap exists in primary school, it only widens in secondary education and above, thus increasing girls' disadvantage as the grades progress.

In countries where gender parity has been achieved in primary school enrollment, girls actually attend and finish secondary school in numbers equal to (and even higher than) boys.

The same 2004 UNICEF report provides the following data:

Special attention needs to be focused on adolescent children, as the transition from primary to secondary school occurs at a critical juncture in human development. Adolescents drop out of school because of numerous social and economic pressures, but adolescent girls are particularly affected and become more vulnerable to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, along with economic exploitation.

Keeping adolescent girls on track through formal education translates into their increased health, safety, and well-being. They are less likely to be trafficked or disappear, and more likely to live empowered lives, productively participating in their communities.

Region	% of school-age Boys attending Secondary school	% of school-age Girls attending Secondary school	Literacy rate for adult women (ratio of females to males)
Sub-Saharan Africa	21%	20%	76%
Eastern & Southern Africa	16%	17%	85%
Western & Central Africa	26%	22%	63%
Middle East & North Africa	50%	44%	77%
South Asia	54%	48%	64%
East Asia & Pacific	53%*	55%*	92%
Latin America & the Caribbean	44%	51%	99%
Central & Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent states	NA	NA	97%

*Does not include China.

Tertiary or Higher Education

Although worldwide only 25% of all women attend institutions of higher education, significant gains have been made over the last several decades. The regional disparity is dramatic, and is related to overall economic development trends.

Region	Percent of Women Enrolled in Higher Education
World	25%
Arab Countries	21%
Eastern and Central Europe	63%
North America and Western Europe	80%
Central Asia	28%
Sub-Saharan Africa	4%

- One of the difficulties in evaluating this indicator, however, is that the quality of higher education around the world varies greatly. Developing countries on the whole have fewer universities, and both women and men attend higher education in smaller numbers. So even though only 4% of women are attending higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rates for men are low as well.
- This appears to be changing, however, and some developing countries, including Brazil, India, China, and Egypt among them, appear to be catching up to the developed world. UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has done some more in-depth research through a project called the World Education Indicators (WEI) Program. Their research shows women in samples of both developing and developed countries actually outnumber men in 4-year college programs (B.A or equivalent); yet men still outnumber women in advanced graduate research programs (Masters and PhD).

Segregation in Fields of Study

Throughout school, girls and women tend to show strength in reading and language arts, while boys and men tend to dominate math and science.

- This gap is narrowing in most regions, but still contributes to gender segregation in later

employment, especially with regard to technology, physics, and engineering.

- While the gap was once seen as related to the innate abilities of men and women, many now believe that it is more likely to be a function of cultural norms and attitudes regarding women's and men's proclivities.

Literacy – The Bottom Line

Of underlying importance is overall literacy for women. Basic literacy is often the window for empowering women on a variety of levels, such as improving quality of life and health.

- Women make up **two-thirds of all illiterate adults** in the world; this figure is virtually unchanged from 1985. This translates to 320 million women being unable to read.
- Nearly **a quarter of all women in the world** are illiterate, an improvement since 1985, when the figure was 30%. Again, women in poor countries fare the worst.

Region	Percent of Women Who Are Illiterate
World	22%
Africa	48%
Asia	27%
Latin America	10%
Europe	2%
North America	5%

When compared with men, the greatest gaps in literacy are seen in China, India, Sub Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union.

Why is literacy for women and girls so important?

Consider this quote from former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan:

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For

everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right...”

Women and Health

Women and Health: Overview
Maternal Mortality
Factors Influencing Maternal Mortality
Family Planning
HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections
Breast Cancer
Other Health Concerns
Mental Health

Women and Health: Overview

It is increasingly the view of experts that women's health issues need to be given special consideration within the context of larger public health.

- Women not only suffer from gender-specific illnesses, but they also experience universal illnesses differently.
- Women's lack of empowerment impacts prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes for ailments of all kinds. They are less likely to have health insurance, and to have access to health care.

Although women tend to live longer than men, life expectancy statistics do not capture quality of life. It has been noted that women are vulnerable even at the point of conception, with preference for sons leading to abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide. The vulnerability of girls and women increases dramatically as they reach reproductive age. And finally, while women vastly outnumber men among the elderly population, the best that can be said for many is that they are again vulnerable, this time to physical and mental health challenges at the end of life.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Women and Health

Maternal Mortality

Nothing less than the survival of the human race depends on childbearing; yet for many women, **pregnancy and childbirth are deadly**.

- Approximately 125 million women give birth each year.
- Half of these deliveries involve complications; over 500,000 women die every year (1600 per day) due to complications of pregnancy or childbirth. Another 18 million are left disabled or chronically ill.
- Ninety-eight percent of these are poor women; almost all are found in the developing world, and most of these deaths are preventable given basic medical care.
- According to a new analysis of global maternal mortality statistics by the New Internationalist, a woman's chances of dying in childbirth are:
 - In the least developed countries, 1 in 450.
 - In developing countries, 1 in 850.
 - In the developed world, 1 in 8000.

Nearly 85% of all maternal deaths occur in **Africa and South Asia**.

- In Africa, the average rate is 1 in 19; in Asia, it is 1 in 32. In Latin America, it is 1 in 188.
- The highest rates of maternal mortality are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where a woman in Niger has a 1 in 7 chance of dying. With the exception of only

Afghanistan (1 in 8), the top ten highest rates are all in this region.

- The lowest maternal mortality rates are found in Ireland, with only 1 in 47,600 pregnancies ending in maternal death. Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and North America also have low maternal death rates.
- The U.S. has a higher than expected rate (1 in 4800, only the 40th lowest), which is attributed to lack of universal health care and economic inequality.

The UN Millennium Development Goals seek a 75% reduction in maternal mortality between 1990 and 2015 (or 5.5% per year). Although some improvement has been seen, overall rates have been falling by less than 1% per year.

Factors Influencing Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality is directly related to poverty. In fact, death from pregnancy or childbirth rarely occurs in the developed world. All the risk factors are related to a women's economic situation.

- The more pregnancies a woman has, the greater her chances of dying. The poorer and less educated a woman is, the more likely she is to have **high fertility**. This is seen most dramatically in Sub Saharan Africa where rates of births per women and maternal deaths are the highest in the world. Approximately ten countries in that region have rates of more than six births per woman. This occurs nowhere else on the planet; only a few countries outside Sub Saharan

Africa have more than four births per woman. Many developed countries have less than two.

- **Teen pregnancy** is a major risk factor for maternal mortality – younger mothers are more likely to experience complications and to die from them. Although teen pregnancy rates have been falling globally, they remain high in the developing world. In fact, 90% of all teen mothers live in poor countries.
- **Lack of prenatal health** care is another factor. This has been improving, even in the developing world, with 74% of women in poor countries receiving one prenatal visit per pregnancy, up from 54% in 1990. However, the World Health Organization recommends a minimum of four visits per pregnancy for optimal care. Less than 45% of women in Sub Saharan Africa receive four visits. Complications at birth are especially deadly when these births are not attended by physicians, nurses, or midwives. This is the case mostly in Haiti, Sub Saharan Africa, and South and Central Asia – Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan – where only 40-47% of births are attended by medical personnel.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

- Approximately 50% of women of childbearing age worldwide use some type of contraceptive. Yet access to contraceptives is uneven. In most developing countries, the cost is prohibitive and/or options are limited.
- Contraceptive use is also linked to women's status in society. In patriarchal systems, women often do not have the power to insist that their partners use condoms. Female-controlled contraceptives are considered a better option, but are largely unavailable in poor countries.

Family Planning

High birth rates in underdeveloped countries are associated with multiple health risks; they contribute to women's impoverishment and to generally lower economic development. It would seem that **preventing many of these pregnancies, and encouraging more time between pregnancies, would improve the health of poor women and their children, and have beneficial effects on their societies.**

- It is estimated that one-fourth of all maternal deaths could be prevented by family planning services, namely by preventing pregnancy in those considered at risk for complications. This includes teenage mothers, those who have experienced complications in pregnancy or childbirth before, and those in poor health generally.
- Many believe family planning to be a fundamental right of women. It is estimated that almost half of the 200 million pregnancies that occur each year are "unwanted" or "ill-timed."

Abortion is a heavily loaded subject – morally, politically, and socially. However, from a public health standpoint, several facts are worth noting:

- The WHO has estimated that the failure rate of contraceptives, when perfectly used, results in six million pregnancies annually. If imperfectly used (which is more often the case, especially in the developing world), this estimate rises to 26 million annually.
- There are an estimated 50 million abortions performed each year, involving one-fourth of the world's pregnancies.
- Half of these abortions are legal and safe; half are illegal and considered unsafe. It has been shown that **making abortion illegal does not affect the overall rate of abortion**; such legislation only increases the proportion of illegal and unsafe abortions. For example, the rate of abortion is roughly the same (1 in 4 pregnancies) in China where abortion is legal and easily accessible, and in Latin America where it is largely illegal.
- Thirteen percent of all maternal deaths (70,000 women) are due to unsafe abortions. Over 90% of

these occur in the developing world where abortion is difficult to obtain. The risk of dying from an unsafe abortion is 1 in 250 in a poor country; it is 1 in 3700 in a rich country.

- Debunking the myth that abortion is the realm of irresponsible teenagers, Joni Seager has noted that, “most women in the world who seek abortions are married, or live in stable unions, and already have children.”
- One-fourth of the world’s women live in countries where abortion is illegal or highly restricted. A safe and legal abortion can generally not be had in Sub Saharan Africa. The most liberal abortion laws are found in China, the U.S., and Europe (including the former Soviet Union).
- Even within countries where abortion is technically legal, access is often severely limited. This is, ironically, the case in both poor countries of the world where doctors are scarce, and in the United States, where doctors are often discouraged from performing abortions. It is estimated that, in 2005, 87% of U.S. counties were not served by an abortion provider.

Abortion politics can be found not only in individual countries, but in international aid infrastructure as well. The “**global gag rule**” is an example.

- Beginning in the Reagan and continued in both Bush Administrations, laws have been passed to prohibit U.S. aid dollars from going to clinics all over the world that offer a full range of family planning (contraceptive) services, including abortion.
- In terms of total number of dollars, the U.S. is the largest provider of aid in the world (though not in percentage of GDP), and these restrictions have hampered family planning efforts globally.
- In January 2009, President Obama announced he would roll back the global gag rule, allowing official USAID funds to again flow to international clinics without restrictions on what doctors can say and do for pregnant women or those seeking to avoid pregnancy. Most of these clinics are run through UN agencies and NGOs and serve women considered at the highest risk for maternal mortality.

HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections

There are 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world today, with 5.8 million new cases reported each year. **Although HIV/AIDS infection rates are higher globally among men than women, a disturbing trend can be found in the developing world where the majority of new infections are among women.** It has been estimated that five women are infected with HIV every minute of every day. For this reason, experts often say that the face of AIDS is increasingly female.

Expert Anne Firth Murray has written that **women are both biologically and socially more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than men.**

- Biologically women are more vulnerable because their genitalia is prone to infection through small abrasions in soft tissue that often occur during intercourse, especially in forced sex.
- Socially women’s relative lack of empowerment make them vulnerable in sexual relationships – to forced sex, to unprotected sex, and to sex with men who are likely to be infected with the virus (promiscuous men and older men). This is the case particularly in the developing world where women’s life choices are limited and women are often subordinate to men. Although prostitution carries a high risk of infection, women are more likely to get the virus from their husbands than through other avenues of transmission.

UNAIDS reports that, in the developing world, 62% of infected youth are women and the disparity is growing. The situation is most dire in Sub Saharan Africa where infection rates in the general population are above 20% in some countries. Three-quarters of all AIDS deaths in 2007 occurred in this region.

Beyond infection with the virus, **women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS in other ways as well:**

- Women are less likely to receive treatment for HIV/AIDS because of the stigma and the cost associated with antiretroviral drugs in many countries.
- Without proper intervention, women may pass the virus onto their children during childbirth or breastfeeding.

- They are also more likely to be the caregivers for others who suffer from the disease. Women are more likely to have to abandon education or paid employment to care for sick family members.
- The HIV/AIDS epidemic has created an enormous population of orphans, as women and men in their prime years die from the disease, leaving behind small children. Among these orphans, those most at risk for a variety of awful outcomes are girls.

Not only preventing, but also mitigating the socio-cultural effects of the epidemic already underway, is of high priority to the public health community. As is the case with all health issues, there is a strong correlation between high rates of HIV/AIDS and poverty, as entire generations succumb to disability and death, robbing countries of their most potentially productive citizens and creating generations of disadvantaged orphans.

Other **Sexually Transmitted Infections** (STIs)

Besides HIV/AIDS, women are vulnerable to other types of sexually-transmitted diseases as well. Though not necessarily fatal, these infections can cause infertility and cervical cancer.

- Women in the developing world generally do not receive routine gynecological care, and experience greater complications and worse outcomes than women in the developed world where STIs are concerned.
- But women in the developed world are hardly immune – new infection rates in wealthy countries are alarming to public health experts. It is thought that with routine screening and early treatment, cervical cancer in particular (thought to begin with a sexually-transmitted virus) could be eliminated as a deadly disease.

Breast Cancer

Unlike the other diseases mentioned here, **breast cancer is an epidemic seen more often in developed than developing countries**, with fully half of all cases found in Europe and North America. And the problem is only growing, with 1 in 8 women affected worldwide, up from 1 in 20 in 1980.

- The United States has the highest rate of incidence with 101 per 100,000 women facing the disease. This

is a rate a bit higher than Europe, approximately double that of Latin America and double or triple that of African and Asian countries.

- Factors thought to increase risk include delayed childbearing, diet, alcohol use, and environmental toxins.

It is important to note that women in **Western industrialized countries have greater rates of breast cancer, but they have lower death rates from the disease.**

- For example, India and China both have an incidence rate of less than 25 per 100,000 women, yet the number of people who die each week is comparable: 704 in China, 861 in India, and 798 in the U.S.
- This is largely due to early detection and treatment that is available in the developed world.
- Correlation with poverty holds up when you look at death rates within industrialized countries as well – poor women are more likely to die from the disease if it is contracted, but less likely to contract it.

Other Health Concerns

- Women are slightly more likely than men to have **diabetes**; 55% of all diabetes deaths occur in women.
- Because they tend to live longer, women are overrepresented in the population living with Alzheimer's and other **diseases of old age**, including blindness.
- **Cardiovascular disease**, once the purview of men, is on the rise in women. Not as much is known about women and heart disease, and many heart attacks in women go undetected because the classic symptoms are often different in men and women.
- **Respiratory illnesses** are of growing concern as well. Tobacco use among women is rising, especially in developing countries. The WHO reports that women are more likely to become addicted to cigarettes than men and to have less success quitting the habit. Nearly half of all deaths from respiratory illness among women in the developing world come from inhalation of indoor smoke used in cooking fires.
- Because **exercise** is associated with decreased incidence of all the above diseases, participation

of girls in sports is an issue of great concern, albeit mainly in the developed world. Title IX legislation in the United States is an example of commitment to girls' athletics. Implementation of this commitment has been uneven, but most agree that significant progress has been made in achieving parity in funding for women's sports.

See the Girl Child section for information on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a health issue related to culture, largely in the developing world.

Mental Health

Mental illness can take many forms, and derive from a variety of causes. Though more research is needed, **experts have found that women experience mental illness differently than men.**

- Women are particularly vulnerable to mental illness when they lack control over their social and economic status, and when their caregiving responsibilities are considerable – conditions affecting women all over the world, particularly those living in poverty, and in extremely patriarchal societies.
- Women are more likely than men to experience anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. Unipolar depression is twice as prevalent in women than in men, and appears to be harder to treat successfully.
- Alcoholism is more prevalent among men than women, but women are less likely to disclose and seek treatment for substance abuse.
- Mental illness in women is often linked to sexual violence. Rape and molestation victims commonly experience the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Women (and children) make up 80% of the world's refugee population displaced by violent conflict and natural disasters – this puts them at enormous risk for mental health issues which often go untreated as aid agencies focus on their urgent material needs.
- Women are less likely to commit suicide than men. Yet, interestingly, more women than men make unsuccessful suicide attempts. It is not thought that women are inherently less effective at completing suicide; rather, many women turn to suicide attempts in an urgent attempt to get help.

Violence Against Women

Violence Against Women: Overview
Why Are Women Vulnerable to Domestic Violence?
A Universal Problem
Costs of Violence Against Women

Violence Against Women: Overview

Women all around the world are susceptible to many types of violence. The Convention Eliminating Discrimination Against Women addresses three types of violence: violence occurring in the family, violence in the community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women placed violence in the context of human rights.

Violence against women is most often committed by someone known, usually a husband or boyfriend, and it is this type of violence that will be explored in this section. It is estimated that **1 in 3 women have been or will be the victim of violence by an intimate partner** – beaten, raped, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused. Domestic violence affects poor and rich countries, all cultures and ethnicities. No region of the world is immune. Today approximately 100 countries have specific laws and/or policies in place to criminalize domestic violence, yet efforts at prevention and prosecution have been uneven. Empowering women with education and economic independence is critical, as is addressing the attitudes of men and boys and gender stereotyping in the media.

See the Conflict section for a discussion of war-related violence toward women. See the Girl Child section for sex trafficking. See the Human Rights section for a discussion of human rights applications.

Violence Against Women

Why Are Women Vulnerable to Domestic Violence?

Experts believe that women's **unequal status in families and societies** contributes to their victimization.

- When power relations are uneven, men are able to exert control in a variety of ways. From threats to actual violence, dependency plays a role.
- Women who have little financial or sociocultural autonomy have fewer options in life, including escape from an abusive partner.
- Many societies have discriminatory divorce laws and practices, trapping women in abusive marriages or forcing them to choose between marriage and custody of their children.
- Domestic violence is often treated as a private matter, exempt from norms and laws that apply to stranger violence. Victims face stigma not associated with other crimes. Impunity emboldens perpetrators.
- Implicit acceptance of violence against women leads victims to vastly underreport instances of abuse. When they do report abuse, legal mechanisms for remedying the situation are often unavailable – the laws don't apply or they are unevenly enforced by police and judges. This creates a vicious cycle where women feel that if they take the risk of speaking out, they will not receive justice, which leads to more instances of domestic violence going unreported.

Amnesty International has described women as being in “**double jeopardy**” where violence is concerned – overrepresented as victims and underrepresented as decision-makers in society. They are more likely to be hurt and less likely to receive justice than any other type of victim.

A Universal Problem

In her *Atlas of Women in the World*, Joni Seager notes that the highest concentrations of reported domestic violence are spread throughout the world. See the sampling below:

Country	% of Women Who Report Suffering from Domestic Violence
Russia	70%
United States	31%
Bolivia	70%
Turkey	58%
Egypt	47%
Ghana	33%
UAE	66%
Pakistan	80%
South Korea	38%

Physical Violence

- Battering or beating is a form of physical domestic violence just as common in the developed as the developing world. In fact, the number one form of

- injury sustained by women in the United States is battering by an intimate partner.
- For women all over the world, violence proves deadly. The UN estimates that between 40 and 70% of all female murder victims in the U.S., Australia, Canada, Israel, and South Africa were killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
 - In some traditional cultures in the Middle East and Asia, murder of women is in the form of dowry murders or honor killings and is condoned by society. Dowry murders involve disputes over dowry or marriage benefits, and include bride burnings in India, thought to affect up to 6000 women annually. Honor killings are more common in the Middle East where a man (husband, brother, father) is given immunity for killing a woman who is thought to have brought shame on the family.

Mental Abuse

Psychological terror is considered domestic violence.

- It can take the form of excessively controlling behaviors, such as when men restrict a woman's mobility and activities.
- It can take the form of verbal abuse where women are subjected to insults and systematic assaults to their self-esteem.
- It can take the form of threats of physical violence. Most situations of mental abuse are accompanied by physical and/or sexual violence; in other cases women often succumb to demeaning treatment in order to avoid escalation.

Sexual Violence

One in five women worldwide is thought to have experienced sexual violence of some kind. This includes sexual assault, molestation, rape, and exploitation.

- Girls and younger women are at the highest risk for sexual violence of all kinds.
- Forced sex can be common in marriage as well, particularly in societies with highly unequal gender relations. In many countries throughout Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, marital rape is not illegal.

- Either deliberate or accidental HIV infection can result from rape. Men are sometimes led to believe that sex with a virgin will cure the disease.
- Sexual violence can also take the form of sexual exploitation, either through prostitution, trafficking, or even informal quid-pro-quo exchanges that are coerced. These acts are more common in developing countries, especially throughout Sub Saharan Africa and Asia.

The Costs of Violence Against Women

Violence against women takes an enormous toll, not only on the women who experience it, but on the children who witness it, and the societies that must bear the financial cost.

- The **health implications** for victims are immense. These can be long-term physical disabilities as well as psychological trauma. They can also be isolation and depression due to the stigma of victimization.
- Costs to victims include **missed opportunities**. Girls miss school; women miss work; time and energy are diverted from the pursuit of economic and personal well-being.
- **Children** bear the burden as well. Their lives are disrupted when their female caregivers are hurt or killed. As witnesses to violence perpetrated against mothers, daughters, and sisters, many are thought to suffer long-term stress and disability. Moreover, boys and men who witness abuse are more likely to be perpetrators themselves.
- Finally, **society suffers** – not only in terms of the social and moral fabric of life, but also in economic terms. The World Health Organization estimates that some countries end up spending up to 4% of GDP on violence-related expenditures, a significant sum for developing and wealthy countries alike. This is money that is not being invested in health care, education, and economic growth.

Women in Armed Conflict

- Women in Armed Conflict: Overview
- Women as Victims of War
- Women and Peace
- Other Issues Involving Women and Armed Conflict

Women in Armed Conflict: Overview

Women are victims of war in numerous ways. The UN has reported that **90% of modern war casualties are civilians, disproportionately women and children**. It has been estimated that for every person directly killed in conflict, nine more are likely to die from starvation or disease.

The chaos that accompanies war takes a particular toll on women – from the destruction of homes and communities to widowhood to opportunistic crimes such as rape to displacement and life in refugee camps.

Many areas of the world wracked by conflict today were already some of the harshest places for women to live. Experts note that this is not a coincidence, and believe that if women were empowered, perhaps less violence would prevail. This has led to concerted efforts to involve women in post-conflict reconciliation activities, as well as conflict-prevention initiatives.



Women in a Chadian refugee camp. Photo courtesy of Mark Knobil.

Women in Armed Conflict

Women as Victims of War

Civilian Casualties

The tools of modern warfare rarely differentiate between civilians and combatants. Although this has been true to some extent in the past, several of today's favored weapons are particularly deadly for civilians.

- These include land mines, cluster munitions, and suicide bombers.
- High technology drone bombers make mistakes and hit civilians; door to door combat in urban guerilla settings can lead to firefights that kill families.
- Roadside bombs kill innocent drivers, passengers, and pedestrians.

Civilian casualties in today's wars are often more than collateral damage. **Civilians may be targeted in an effort to terrorize enemy societies.** Victims don't always lose their lives, but may have them irreversibly altered.

Rape as a Weapon of War

If the goal is to destroy the social fabric of society, the rape of girls and women is seen as a particularly effective weapon.

The UN recognizes four different types of war rape:

- Genocidal rape where specific ethnic groups are targeted.
- Opportunistic rape that occurs when the rule of law breaks down during war time.
- Political rape that is used to punish certain groups.

- Forced concubinage in which girls and women are forced into sex slavery in militias and armies.

The **effects of rape** are devastating on victims, families, and entire communities, as witnessed in recent conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo:

- Girls and women who are raped are stigmatized, sometimes driven from their homes by the shame. Many suffer long-term physical and emotional damage, which can make them unable to fill their roles in the community.
- Many victims become pregnant, giving birth to unwanted children who are themselves stigmatized by the rape.
- Rape can be used specifically as a tool to infect women and girls with HIV when the perpetrator is HIV positive, and there are accounts of systematic rape and infection occurring with genocidal aims.
- It is also an effective tool of humiliation – of fathers, brothers, husbands, and boyfriends of victims, further fraying the norms and connections of communities.
- The threat of rape in war time is extremely disruptive to families who must forego water, food, or firewood for fear of sending their girls and women outside the home.
- In 1997 and 2001, history was made when a UN Tribunal indicted and later jailed Bosnian Serb perpetrators on charges of rape. The International Criminal Court now recognizes rape as a war crime, but experts believe the charges are under-prosecuted.

Human rights activists are watching the progress of several Congolese indictees as an indicator of the international community's commitment to ending war rape.

Destruction and Displacement

Caregivers and those responsible for obtaining food, water, and basic needs for families suffer extreme hardship when life is disrupted by war. Crops, wells, and markets are destroyed. Roads are blocked. Supplies are stolen or burned by armies. Malnutrition and disease sweep through families and communities.

Displacement by war drives many women and their children to lives of ever-shifting temporary existence. Many end up in refugee camps where life is exceedingly hard – **up to 80% of all refugee and asylum seekers are thought to be women and children.** They are vulnerable not only to material hardship, but also to the possibility of exploitation. Their lives often quickly become humanitarian crises.

A large percentage of women driven from their homes by armed conflict are never able to return. Those that do may experience myriad health risks.

Women and Peace

Women are increasingly being recruited as **agents of diplomacy, conflict prevention, reconstruction, and reconciliation.**

- Several organizations such as Women Waging Peace work to train and integrate women into power structures that help to put post-conflict societies back together and mediate hostilities.
- The recent appointments of Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton as U.S. Secretaries of State are major advances for women in the halls of diplomacy.
- Fifteen years after the genocide in Rwanda, many women hold political office and oversee institutions of justice that are critical to the country's peace and stability.
- Liberia, a country destroyed by years of brutal civil war, is on the mend under the leadership of Africa's first female President and peace activist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Other Issues Related to Women and Armed Conflict

Women serve in the military all over the world.

- Although they cannot serve in submarine or ground combat units, women make up 15% of all soldiers on active duty in the United States Armed Forces, 10% of the Coast Guard, and 17% of National Guard and Reservists.
- They have been seen as particularly useful in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where they are able to communicate with local women when tradition prohibits contact with male soldiers.
- However, women in the military, in the U.S. and elsewhere, are underrepresented in the higher ranks of leadership, and have been known to be subjected to sexual harassment and even assault within the ranks of largely male units.

The Girl Child

The Girl Child: Overview
Disadvantaged at Birth – Son Preference and Missing Girls
Inequality in Critical Years
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
Sexual Predation
Body Image Issues
The Girl Child in the Developed World



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

The Girl Child: Overview

The United Nations sets aside special consideration for the Girl Child within the larger context of women in the world.

Female children face significant disadvantages in societies with great gender inequality, initiating a cycle of women's disempowerment that is difficult to escape. At issue are abrogations of basic universal human rights as well as gender-specific abuses. As is usually the case, **most issues around this topic stem from poverty**. Growing attention is being focused on leveling the playing field for young girls and boys, protecting girls from predation, and providing affirmative action to redress entrenched discrimination in societies. The goal is to help today's generation of girl children, and create a positive influence for generations to come.

In addition to the UN, the World Bank is focusing on this issue with its Adolescent Girls Initiative that seeks to help girls age 16-24 finish school and transition to employment.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

The Girl Child

Disadvantaged at Birth – Son Preference and Missing Girls

The issues facing girls in today's world are many, and they start early, even before a girl's birth. Many families favor sons, for a variety of reasons both economic (i.e., sons are seen as economic breadwinners) and cultural (i.e., being expected to care for a wife's family or to offer a dowry when a girl is married attaches extra burdens to girls).

- In some societies, girls are in danger upon conception. **Sex-selection by abortion**, although almost always technically illegal, is practiced where a preference for sons collides with modern sonogram technology and access to health care providers.
- **Female infanticide**, or the killing of girl newborns, is another way in which son preference is practiced. In some societies, even into early childhood, girls are often less valued and in greater danger of malnutrition and neglect.
- These practices have led to a dramatic **gender ratio imbalance** in places such as China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Egypt, and South Korea. In India alone, it is estimated that there are 23 million missing girls; in China the figure is 30 million. New laws have been put in place in some instances to combat sex-selection by abortion and female infanticide, but the practices often continue and will do so until a change in cultural perceptions and economic factors occurs.

Inequality in Critical Years

- **Education** – Although girls are nearing equity in primary school enrollment in the world, actual attendance and quality of education issues remain. This early inequality, when it exists, is self-perpetuating and leads to lower enrollment in higher grades.
- **Labor** – In developing and transitioning economies, girls' participation in the unpaid economy begins at an early age. Compared with boys of similar age, their days start earlier and involve more manual labor, water and firewood gathering, and caregiving responsibilities. In Export Processing Zones, child labor is commonplace and the majority of youth working in transnational factories are girls. This often interferes with education and with opportunities to move into decent work in the future.
- **Health** – Access to health care is a problem for both boys and girls in developing countries, but, typically, when services are rationed within a family, it is girl children who lose. This, combined with their lower status in society, puts them at risk for all the health problems women face.
- **Safety** – Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual predation, within the family and in society at large. Traveling to and from school, or doing chores outside the home (such as walking long distances for firewood) often puts them in danger. Schools themselves can be places where girls experience sexual harassment and exploitation.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation is a **rite of initiation into adulthood** for some girls living in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

- The procedure involves removing all or part of the female genitalia; it may also involve sewing up the vagina to “protect” a girl’s virginity.
- Societies that practice the tradition cite reasons of “cleanliness” and “purification.” The chairman of an Indonesian foundation providing free female circumcision has said the procedure is designed to “stabilize a girl’s libido, make her more beautiful in the eyes of her husband, and balance her psychology.”
- The international human rights community (including multiple UN bodies and conventions) defines FGM as “a harmful practice meant to control women’s sexuality.” Most are working to have it abolished.
- It is estimated that 140 million girls worldwide have undergone the procedure, which is practiced on approximately two million girls per year.
- The highest rates (90% of girls or more) are found in Indonesia, Egypt, Sudan, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.
- FGM often occurs even where prohibited by law, and is common in immigrant communities from these countries living even in the developed world.
- Critics of FGM often face charges of cultural insensitivity, but most see the practice as a human rights violation.
- Read about FGM today in Sara Corbett’s New York Times Magazine article.

The World Health Organization **opposes FGM on health grounds** as well.

- In many countries, the procedure may be performed with primitive instruments, including shards of glass.
- Complications may include infection, bleeding, and life-long pain.
- Increasingly more FGM procedures are performed by trained medical personnel, which improves the safety of the procedure, but concerns human rights activists who worry that the practice is moving into the mainstream in some countries.

Sexual Predation

Girls are at high risk of **sexual exploitation**, by family members and others.

Teenage girls in developing countries are vulnerable to **sex trafficking** as well. Lacking options, they often resort to prostitution, or are forced into doing so.

- The UN has reported that up to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders, most for the purposes of sex slavery. Eighty percent are women and girls; half are minors.
- Some are kidnapped into forced sex labor; others begin as voluntary economic migrants and end up resorting to prostitution; some are tricked into servitude and debt bondage.
- Most trafficked girls come from East and Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Sub Saharan Africa. It is estimated that the sex trade makes up 14% of Thailand’s total GDP.
- Many of these girls end up in the developed world. U.S. Immigration officials estimate that up to 50,000 of them enter the U.S. every year.

Another form of predation takes the form of **mail order brides**. These are women who are “purchased” by men in other countries. Again, this type of predation derives from women having few options for advancement or even survival in some societies. Consider this testimonial posted on goodwife.com quoted by Joni Seager:

“We, as (Western) men, are more and more wanting to step back from the types of (Western) women we meet now. With many women taking on the ‘me first’ feminist agenda and the man continuing to take a back seat to her desire for power and control many men are turned off by this and look back to having a more traditional woman as our partner.”

Body Image Issues

Adolescent girls who are exposed to modern media images of what their developing bodies are supposed to look like often experience serious self-esteem issues. Eating disorders, depression, and risky behaviors often result. The combination of exploring identity and self that occurs naturally in adolescence with the rapid, and sometimes awkward, physical changes that occur in the body makes

adolescent girls particularly vulnerable to body image issues. This tends to be more of a problem in developed nations where media saturation is intense and gender stereotypes are ubiquitous in popular culture. See Media section for more.

The Girl Child in the Developed World

Many experts point out that for girls living in modern, industrialized economies with lower levels of gender inequality, the future has actually never looked better.

- Girls outperform boys in many educational settings; more go to college and beyond, and their representation in non-traditional women's employment is growing.
- These girls can expect to fare exponentially better than their sisters in the developing world. The only group for whom this is not true is girls living in poverty within wealthier societies.

Women and the Environment

- Women and the Environment: Overview
- Women as Front Line Observers of Climate Change
- The Impact of Climate Change on Women
- Women as Agents of Positive Change
- Profile – Wangari Maathai Women and the Environment
- Profile – Wangari Maathai

Women and the Environment: Overview

Women are seen in the context of global climate change in two iterations: **as direct victims and as agents of change.**

- Working as they do in intimate interaction with the natural environment as farmers, water carriers, and firewood-gatherers in poor countries, they are the first to see changes in ecosystems, and these changes affect them profoundly.
- They are also often the most knowledgeable about these changes and how to mitigate them or compensate for them.

With both an immense stake in natural resource flows and credibility in documenting changes, women are seen as well-suited for grassroots activism in this area. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, is an excellent example of this intersection of environment and grassroots activism – see her profile below. What is missing, many believe, is the representation of women in decision-making bodies at the national and international level, and in government regulatory and legislative bodies.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

“Women are the most vulnerable and the best poised to curb the effect of climate change.”

- Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 2007

Women and the Environment

Women as Front Line Observers of Climate Change

Indian activist Vandana Shiva has likened women’s role in the detection of climate change to that of a **canary in a coal mine** – in developing countries especially, they act as de facto testers of environmental health by virtue of their role in obtaining basic provisions for their families from the land.

- They are the first to notice the decreased arability of farm land as crop yields go down and sand replaces soil.
- They are the first to notice water scarcity and water contamination.

The Impact of Climate Change on Women

- As resource managers for their families, **women’s time use** is heavily impacted by environmental degradation. Every extra hour spent seeking out new water and firewood sources, every extra hour spent extracting foodstuffs from diminishing crop land are hours not spent in school, in job training, in paid work, or even in leisure and health- promoting activities.
- **Scarcity** is often disproportionately born by women as they forego meals for the sake of their children.
- **Pollution** affects women differently than men – from contaminants that endanger pregnancies to respiratory illnesses exacerbated by cooking over open

fires to contact with contaminated water through washing clothes and dishes.

- **Natural disasters** brought on by climate change disproportionately kill women. Poor people are generally more vulnerable to natural disasters, and women are more likely to be poor. For example, it is estimated that 70-80% of the victims of the 2004 Asian Tsunami and 90% of the victims of the 1991 Bangladeshi cyclone were women. Many of Hurricane Katrina’s victims in the U.S. were women who did not have the means for evacuation or the economic cushion to survive the aftermath. It has even been shown that in societies with great gender disparity, humanitarian aid often does not reach women at the same rates as men.
- Resource scarcity caused by environmental degradation can sometimes lead to **conflict and war** (witness Darfur), and the fall-out of conflicts disproportionately affects women. See Women in Armed Conflict.

Women as Agents of Positive Change

- Women act as agents of change on the **grassroots and family level**, making decisions about resource consumption that impact global trends. This happens all around the world, from wise choices about crop rotation in the developing world to buying sustainable products in the developed world.
- Because the impacts of climate change are being felt more immediately by women, they are well positioned

to become effective **environmental activists**.

Numerous women's groups, fighting for the health and safety of their families, have led protests aimed at mitigating industrial pollution or the construction of ecosystem-altering dams. Ecotourism is a growing field in the developing world with many opportunities for women's employment.

- Considerable attention is being focused now on utilizing women's skills and knowledge about environmental matters on **leadership levels**, reflecting an awareness of gender disparity in decision-making in private industry and regulatory bodies.

Profile – Wangari Maathai

“The movement started as a tree planting campaign, but it is a little more than just the planting of trees. It's planting of ideas, it's giving them reasons why they should protect their environmental rights, and giving them reasons why they should protect their women's rights.”

- Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, is a noted environmental and human rights activist who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya in 1976. She was born in a rural area of Kenya, growing up among rolling hills and forests. She received her bachelors and masters degrees in the United States, and later earned her Ph.D. in Germany – she is the first woman in East or Central Africa to obtain a doctorate. After returning to Kenya and becoming a professor at the University of Nairobi, she was shocked to note the amount of deforestation across Kenya's landscape. She saw that women were impacted the most, walking farther and farther to find firewood, lacking enough clean drinking water for their families, and struggling to grow crops in eroded and nutrient-poor soil. She founded the Green Belt Movement to plant trees to protect the soil and restore the forests. She enlisted women to plant these trees, as a means of providing income to women, but also because she wanted to encourage them to see planting trees as just the first step in making positive change for the environment, their families, and their communities. The Green Belt Movement organized workshops on civic education; it encouraged the women to look for the cultural, political, and economic policies and practices that were the



Wangari Maathai

root causes of environmental problems, and to take action to address those root causes.

As the movement began to grow and more women became involved, they came into direct conflict with Kenya's corrupt government. Maathai led the fight against a project to build a skyscraper in Uhuru Park, a popular park in central Nairobi; she led a hunger strike for the release of political prisoners jailed by the government; she also advocated for democratic reforms to be brought to Kenya. Finally, a new leader was elected in 2002, and Wangari Maathai was elected to Parliament and as Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. In 2004, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and continues to work with the Green Belt Movement and to advocate internationally for environmental and human rights. Since its founding, the Green Belt Movement has planted over 40 million trees in Kenya.

Watch the documentary, *Taking Root*, or read her autobiography, *Unbowed*, to find out more about the life and struggle of Wangari Maathai.

Women and Media

- Women and Media: Overview
- Portrayal of Women in Popular Media
- Effects of Gender Stereotyping in the Media
- Women in the News
- Women in Leadership Positions Within the Media Industry
- Women and the Internet

Women and Media: Overview

Gender inequality in the broadcast news and popular media takes two main forms: **the stereotyping of women, and the lack of women in leadership positions within the media industry**. Studies have shown these two trends to be linked – fewer women making decisions in this industry results in fewer diverse, positive, and healthy images of girls and women.

awareness and the entry of more women into jobs in news and entertainment.

The media has been described as a **mirror to society**, which implies that the way women are portrayed and represented pretty much mirrors their status in society.

- Attempts to remedy gender inequality in the media are seen as key to creating an “enabling environment” for the progress of women everywhere.
- Beginning in the 1970s, governments began passing laws that attempted to limit sexual discrimination in media programming and employment.
- In the U.S., the Federal Communications Commission established guidelines covering a range of gender equality issues; this was followed by significant activism on the part of women’s groups through lawsuits, pressure on executives, and general advocacy by watchdog groups.
- However, deregulation of the media industry in the 1980s followed by consolidation of media empires in the 1990s hampered implementation of anti-discriminatory measures.

Most experts agree that **in no country have women achieved gender equality in the media**, despite increasing



Media personality, Oprah Winfrey.

Women and Media

Portrayals of Women in the Popular Media

A recent UNESCO report describes the litany of common images of women in the media: “the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hardfaced corporate and political climber.” The report, released in 2009, states that, at the current rate of progress on stereotyping women, it will take another 75 years to achieve gender equality in the media.

Popular magazines aimed at male and female audiences

are a prominent culprit, tending to feature women with bodies that are unattainable for the average woman, and to focus on stories related to either catching or pleasing a man as a route to success and happiness.

- The Canadian Health Network found that the average female model is not only much taller than the average woman, but weighs nearly 25% less.
- The Media Awareness Network, a Canadian research and advocacy organization, found that women’s magazines are ten times more likely to contain articles and advertisements related to dieting than are men’s magazines, and that three-fourths of women’s magazine covers feature articles about overhauling one’s physical appearance.
- When the Australian magazine *New Woman* departed from usual procedure and ran pictures of overweight or even normal weight women, they received letters overwhelmingly in support of this realism from readers. However, advertisers reacted negatively, and the program was discontinued.

Television is also a culprit, despite gains in recent years.

- Most heroes and protagonists, particularly in prime time programming, tend to be male.
- Studies indicate that nearly three-quarters of all female characters in sitcoms are underweight, and those that are overweight are often the subject of comments or jokes about their bodies made by male characters. One study found that 80% of these comments were followed by canned laughter.
- The problem is not only the images that are portrayed, but also those that are not. For example, women’s sports receive far less air time than men’s sports on network and cable programming.

Video games are another subject of concern.

- ChildrenNow found that the majority of female characters in video games were scantily clad and highly sexualized.
- Some popular video games even portray, and some say glorify, violence against women. The *Grand Theft Auto* series featuring prostitutes is a commonly cited example.

The film industry is seen as not only pandering to stereotypes, but also discriminating against older women in leading roles.

- The number of roles for leading women is far below that of men.
- The use of body doubles for actresses who have less than idealized body proportions is thought to

contribute to unrealistic expectations both men and women have about women's bodies.

Effects of Gender Stereotyping in the Media

The effects of gender inequality in media-saturated culture are thought to be profound.

- One estimate places the number of hours of television watched by the average North American child at 5000 hours, including 80,000 advertisements, before kindergarten age.
- Numerous studies conducted in many countries have found that nearly three-quarters of women reported feeling bad about their bodies after looking at images of models in magazines and advertisements. **Poor body image** can lead to depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. A Canadian study found 5 and 6 year olds who reported having dieted for the purpose of achieving an ideal body. Between 5-10 million Americans have eating disorders, nearly all girls and women. Another 7 million have plastic or cosmetic surgery every year.
- **Sexualization** of content is only increasing. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that of the approximately 14,000 references to sex a teen will see each year in the media, only 165 will contain any reference to delaying sex, using contraceptives, or avoiding sexually transmitted diseases.
- Music videos that contain unflattering and aggressive lyrics about women are also of concern to women's and children's advocates, many of whom see this gender baiting filtering its way down to sexual harassment of girls in schools.

Women in the News

Women continue to be **underrepresented both in the ranks of professional journalists and as the subjects of "hard" news stories**. Hard news refers to political and economic stories; soft news refers to lifestyle, home, and family stories.

- The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) found that in the period 2000-2005, 57% of news presenters were female. But only 29% of all news stories were written by women.

- The GMMP also found that only 32% of hard news stories were either written or covered by female journalists.
- Sunday morning news talk shows are considered prime time for hard news (Meet the Press, etc). Beyond a few familiar faces, studies have found that women are much less likely to be included on panels and, when they are, they are given less air time than male guests.

Women in Leadership Positions Within the Media Industry

Women are **underrepresented in executive positions in media companies and entertainment studios**. One Annenberg study puts the figure at 10% of all executive positions, and only 3% of top leadership posts. They are also underrepresented among film directors and cinematographers. This lack of participation in vital cultural messaging mirrors their lack of participation in decision-making in society generally. This trend holds true in nearly every country, and tends to follow larger gender equality dynamics.

Women and the Internet

A "digital divide" exists in the world, with 80% of internet users residing in the developed world; most of these are male, higher-income, and urban. However, as Joni Seager notes, women are starting to close the gap. Once wired, they are often first adapters of new networking technologies, and use these connections to organize around women's issues.

A *New York Times* article recently reported that the number of websites aimed specifically at women (usually run by women) have increased by 35% in recent years, garnering \$4.4 billion in advertising. A particularly lucrative sector has emerged in the "mommy blog" industry in the developed world. The web has also helped to connect women from disparate parts of the larger women's movement, mobilizing women from different cultures and countries and facilitating the exchange of ideas and strategies for women's empowerment in many contexts.

A downside to the internet is that it facilitates the exploitation of women as well, through the proliferation of pornography and trafficking.

Women and Human Rights

Women and Human Rights: Overview
Why a Human Rights Approach to Gender Equality?
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Additional Notable Human Rights Milestones
The Issue of Cultural Relativism
CEDAW – The US Controversy

Women and Human Rights: Overview

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a declaration adopted by the United Nations which outlines 30 basic rights to which all humans are entitled. See Key Foundation Documents or <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>. Using the UDHR as a framework, the UN developed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which are binding covenants for those countries which have ratified them.

Implementation is overseen within the UN system by multiple bodies and offices with the participation of national governments, NGOs, the justice system, and civil society. See <http://www.un.org/en/rights/>.

It is important to note that **human rights refer not only to rights, but also to obligations on the part of states to protect and take positive action to promote these rights.**

Women's human rights are included in the UDHR:

Everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind such as race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origins, property, birth or other status.

In 1979 *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* went further to specifically connect human rights to the experience of women. *The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* were other key milestones.

Of these declarations, the UN notes they are “texts [that] state general principles and practices that most States accept. Although not legally binding, these instruments have an undeniable moral force.” Generally, implementation of these principles has been another matter entirely, hampered by the depth to which gender inequality is embedded in law and in values and practices not easily reachable by the law. Cultural considerations in societies around the world also play a role.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Women and Human Rights

Why a Human Rights Based Approach to Gender Equality?

For many years, the main rationale behind efforts to attack gender inequality was largely **utilitarian**. Bringing the full productivity and participation of half the world's population to bear on global problems, namely poverty and lack of development, made sense in terms of a means to an end.

Another, complementary trend developed in the latter part of the 20th Century – a trend that viewed gender inequality not necessarily in terms of its effects, but through the **lens of basic human rights**.

- Linking gender discrimination to accepted, universal doctrines of human rights essentially takes the notion of “fairness” to a new level, grounding it in international law.
- This, in theory, **triggers obligations on the part of states** to both protect and positively promote human rights of women, as they are required to do for all persons.
- It also places women's rights squarely in the realm of the United Nations to play a central role in upholding these human rights treaties and monitoring their implementation where women are concerned.
- The strategy also built solidarity between defenders of the general principles of human rights treaties and the women's movement – in civil society, NGOs, government, and community groups, broadening the constituency for combating gender inequality.

The **overarching challenge** lies in moving beyond theory into practice.

- Convincing people that gender equality is a human right is one thing, but seeing that this conviction is reflected in laws, policies, and situations on the ground is another.
- As we have discussed, much segregation and discrimination is de facto, not necessarily de jure. Laws can only go so far in addressing who gets hired, how much they get paid, who gets to go to school when resources are scarce, or who has access to health care. Legislation and policy work must be complemented by tireless activism – internationally, nationally, and locally. Activism must take place not only in the courts, but also in public opinion, community mores and attitudes, and cultural messaging.
- Moreover, experts note that much discrimination and even abuse of women occurs in the private sphere, and there is much disagreement about how far government mechanisms should go in regulating private versus public behavior.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

In 1979, the UN put teeth in the gender component of the UDHR by enacting the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, which went

into force in 1981, after 20 member nations had ratified it. The Convention defines discrimination against women as:

“...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

By accepting CEDAW, **States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms.** They agree to:

- Incorporate “the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women.”
- Establish “tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination.”
- Ensure “the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.”

As of 2008, with the few exceptions noted below, **nearly all countries in the world have signed and ratified CEDAW**, creating the legal obligation to honor it.

- Iran, Sudan, and Somalia, along with several small Pacific Islands, have neither signed nor ratified CEDAW.
- The United States stands alone in the world in having signed but not ratified CEDAW. Signing a convention indicates that a country supports the principles within it, and is intending, in time, to ratify it. It may take years for a country to ratify a convention, or it may never be ratified, for a variety of political reasons. As with other international treaties to which the U.S. is not party (the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court), lack of U.S. support detracts from the enforcement and authority of CEDAW internationally.

In 1995, the **Beijing Platform** reiterated the UN’s commitment to upholding CEDAW and laid out strategies for progress.

Additional Notable Human Rights Milestones

To date, the most progress on the human rights front has been made in punishing extreme and violent treatment of women, mostly during war time:

- **The International Criminal Court (ICC)** – In 1998, advocates successfully lobbied to have crimes specific to women be included in the jurisdiction of the ICC as war crimes and crimes against humanity. These came to include sexual slavery, forced prostitution, sterilization, pregnancy, and sexual violence. Investigations into the use of rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are proceeding now. It is the hope of the human rights community that indictments will be handed down on specific rape charges.
- **Special War Crimes Tribunals** – These bodies recognized war crimes against women with indictments and even prison terms for Japan’s treatment of women during WWII, as well as atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwandan conflicts.
- **Truth and Reconciliation Commissions** – In South Africa, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda, the abuse of women during war and apartheid has been addressed in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.
- **Official Refugee and Asylum Status** – Human rights advocates have long pushed for gender discrimination to be recognized as a legitimate basis for granting legal asylum and refugee status to migrants who arrive in the United States and elsewhere. Progress is underway, but these slots are few and far between, and the competition for them is immense.
- **Involvement of Women in UN Bodies** – Most believe that if the UN is to be the safeguard of human rights internationally, its own staff and its leadership should include equal representation of women. Progress here is improved, but uneven.

The Issue of Cultural Relativism

No discussion of universal human rights can be free from cultural considerations. **There is great disagreement on what standards should be enforced with respect to gender equality, given the cultural, social, and religious diversity of the world’s communities.** Western-style feminism is

often seen as a form of cultural imperialism intended to subvert the social fabric of traditional societies, especially in the Arab and Muslim world. In fact, many experts advocate for culturally-specific strands of empowerment ideology instead of a rigid human rights framework, noting that association with Western values often does more harm than good to activists seeking rights within their own cultural context.

CEDAW—The U.S. Controversy

CEDAW requires signatories to commit to improving the status of women and end discrimination against women worldwide. It would establish legal functions that would hold countries accountable to the United Nations. UN committees would report on each nation's progress through comprehensive reports done every four years.

The controversy over CEDAW in the U.S. is largely centered on the issues of abortion, prostitution, sexual preference, women in the military, maternity benefits, and the federal government's role in enforcing rights.

In 2002, U.S. legislators proposed a series of amendments to CEDAW that would only apply to the United States' version. These changes, called RUDs – for Reservations, Understandings, and Declarations – stipulated that the treaty could not compel the government to allow paid maternity leave or force women to serve in military combat.

Furthermore, the RUDs stipulated that the government would not provide federal funding for abortions as a reproductive right, saying that CEDAW, if ratified, should not “create any right to abortion and in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning.”

Although the Obama Administration has said that it will support the ratification of CEDAW with the 2002 RUDs in place, the Department of Justice is currently conducting a review to determine whether CEDAW should be submitted to the Senate with or without the RUDs.

Liberal advocates would like a “clean” CEDAW ratified – without any RUDs attached. Conservative opponents would prefer to keep the RUDs in place or resist ratification altogether.

CEDAW's opponents argue that its language is too vague and comprehensive. They believe the U.S. Constitution provides sufficient human rights protections and object to

the idea of international law superseding U.S. laws. They also fear CEDAW would provide for the decriminalization of prostitution and open the door to legalized marriage for lesbians, which could translate into legalized marriage for all homosexuals.

Moreover, CEDAW might pave the way for mandated maternity leave benefits, which many business interests consider too expensive to implement. Military leaders argue CEDAW would make women serving in combat compulsory.

Institutional Mechanisms Responsible for Advancing and Protecting the Rights and Interests of Women

Institutional Mechanisms: Overview
Types of Institutional Mechanisms
Gender Budgeting
Status of Current Institutions

Institutional Mechanisms: Overview

A significant foundation of the Beijing Platform for Action is the recognition that inadequate mechanisms exist at all levels to promote the advancement of women.

“National machineries are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness, and in some cases have declined. Often marginalized in national government structures, these mechanisms are frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and insufficient support from national political leadership.”



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Institutional Mechanisms Responsible for Advancing and Protecting the Rights and Interests of Women

Types of Institutional Mechanisms

At the international and national level, formal organizations (or “machinery”) are needed to monitor and address violations of women’s human rights. They are also needed to advance women’s particular interests. These mechanisms are not statutes or laws, but rather provide the infrastructure to promote the implementation of declarations and policies made at various levels.

International or Intergovernmental Level – The United Nations

Numerous agencies and bodies within the UN support the advancement of women. In addition to providing infrastructure for research, monitoring, media campaigns, and policymaking, the UN bodies also have as their mission establishing a structure that national governments could implement at the country level. Some UN bodies make grants to NGOs and to government agencies to implement best practices in women’s empowerment. A sampling:

- **The Human Rights Council** – The Human Rights Council (HRC) is the principal UN intergovernmental body responsible for human rights, replacing the former Commission on Human Rights. One innovative and effective tool implemented by the HRC is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, through which the HRC monitors the fulfillment by each of the UN’s 192 Member States of their human rights obligations and commitments (including CEDAW) over a four-year cycle. Using the Complaint Procedure and Special Rapporteurs, the HRC often makes urgent appeals to governments regarding human rights violations.
- **Third Committee of the General Assembly** – The large number of items on the General Assembly agenda has required that most items be delegated for discussion to six specialized committees. The Third Committee concentrates on agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian and human rights issues, specifically the advancement of women. The Committee adopts non-binding resolutions on human rights issues and recommends them to the General Assembly.
- **Commission on the Status of Women** – The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations specifically established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), with the purpose of exclusively focusing on gender equality and advancement of women. Every year, representatives of Member States gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards, and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide.
- **The UN Population Fund** – The UNFPA is the largest internationally funded source of population assistance to developing countries, helping them improve their reproductive health and family planning services on the basis of individual choice, and formulating population policies that will support sustainable economic development. In its country programs,

UNFPA gives special attention to the strengthening of national machineries for women's advancement, both at the governmental and the non-governmental levels. In Iran, for instance, UNFPA is supporting a program that strengthens the Bureau of Women's Affairs. The Fund's assistance is used to provide nationwide gender sensitization training, which is undertaken to increase the involvement of women in policymaking at both the national and the provincial levels.

- **UNIFEM** – Among other activities, the Women's Fund manages the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, the only multilateral grant-making mechanism that supports local, national and regional efforts to end violence against women and girls.

international, national, and local statistics be “disaggregated” or broken down by gender so that the data will be more relevant in the planning and evaluation of programs.

It is important to remember that many UN declarations and resolutions regarding discrimination against women are non-binding, even to those countries which have ratified them. Compliance can be investigated and publicized, but enforcement is tricky. The institutions charged with the advancement of women are thus often hamstrung by lack of meaningful authority.

National Level – Individual Countries

Many countries have established bureaus of women's affairs or special ministries devoted to the advancement of women. Many of these receive technical assistance and even funding from UN trust funds mentioned above.

Gender Budgeting

Experts agree that national, regional, and international institutional mechanisms need to be supported by “gender budgeting,” or the inclusion of a gender perspective in crafting budget expenditures. Many see gender budgeting as an avenue to more effective and efficient use of resources overall, because men and women use and value resources differently – particularly important in this time of economic crisis. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on gender budgeting in 2003, calling on action by the European Commission to introduce this element into its own budgeting process.

Status of Current Institutional Mechanisms

Although progress has been made in establishing organizations whose purpose is the advancement of women, these institutions are often under-staffed, under-funded and marginalized, which severely hampers their effectiveness. Fragmentation is an issue, despite efforts to consolidate and coordinate multiple bodies. Institutional mechanisms are frequently not inclusive of all women and all gender concerns (see information on GFW's efforts in the Knowledge to Action section). Research is a current topic of particular concern, with experts advocating that



Photo courtesy of Nancy Farese.

Knowledge to Action

What You Can Do

This section of the Monitor brings the information full circle and seeks to inspire further thinking about how individuals can make a difference with what often seem like complex and insurmountable issues.

Most experts note that the term “women’s movement” is misleading. Vice President of Programs Shalini Nataraj, of the Global Fund for Women, has said that the energy and activism associated with improving the global status of women is best captured in the plural: there are many “women’s movements.”

There are thus infinite access points for people who care to get involved. Activism occurs on many levels – within families, communities, organizations, countries, and regions. Just as important as high level policymaking, legislation, and budgeting are the daily conversations and interactions that further understanding and awareness of women’s issues and bring about change in values and attitudes. Here are some examples of ways to get involved:

- Educate the public about what gender equality is and why it matters. Help to dispel myths that suggest feminism is all about radical agendas, and explain that it is rather about realizing the potential of half the world’s population.
- Talk to friends, family, and colleagues. Tell them both the bad and the good news about the global status of women; include not only the statistics, but also the stories of courage and progress.

- Stand up when you witness gender discrimination, from verbal insults to denial of rights and opportunities.
- Use your political voice through voting and advocacy of policies that protect and promote the rights of women. Know what international bodies and your own local and national elected representatives are doing on these issues. Let them know what you think.
- Learn about U.S. policies that on the surface may not seem to be gender-focused, from trade to aid to defense expenditures. Understand how these, in fact, do impact women in this country and around the world.
- Pay attention to the root causes of gender inequality, not just its symptoms. Think systemically and not only in terms of humanitarianism or rescue. Work on the macro and micro level. Think empowerment, not victimhood.
- Volunteer your time working on important issues and connecting personally with individual women who are seeking to improve their lives. Be a tutor, a mentor, an advocate.

Philanthropy for Women’s Empowerment

Donations to women’s organizations are key to the success of the multitude of women’s movements in the world today. Private money complements public spending – it goes places public money doesn’t reach, meets needs public money does not, and often funds innovation critical to progress in the

field as a whole. Some examples of organizations which rely on private contributions:

- Human rights watchdog groups that monitor legislation and local trends and practices, and push for accountability on the protection and promotion of women's rights.
- Research and advocacy organizations that collect data on the status of women and present it to decision-makers.
- Grantmaking organizations that aggregate and leverage private funds and direct them to areas of greatest need.
- Agencies on the ground which work along the spectrum of activities central to women's empowerment, from shelters to schools to immigrant assistance to health care and legal services.

The Global Fund for Women

An example of a women's organization is the Global Fund for Women (GFW), a non-profit organization that advances women's human rights by giving grants to women's organizations in countries around the world. To date, GFW has made 6,973 grants totalling \$73 million to 3,936 groups in 168 countries.

What makes the GFW unique is its grantmaking approach, which is atypical in a number of ways:

- Grantees are women who are often marginalized, not only in society, but also within the mainstream institutions working on women's issues. These grant recipients include the world's poorest and most isolated women, those of lower caste, those living in rural areas, and the disabled; many of the recipients are women who would not necessarily self-identify as feminists, but are working at a grass roots level for change in their communities and whose voices are not often heard at traditional gatherings of women's activists.
- Grants are given to women already working on solutions to problems they have identified in their own communities, using strategies they have devised.
- Grantees are seen as partners, rather than implementers of plans devised from far away. Innovation and non-traditional programming is

rewarded, as is networking and collaboration among grantees.

- GFW places a priority on infrastructure and capacity, making grants for general operating support, stipends for local workers, and travel.

The focus, in short, is increasing women's "agency" or empowerment to change their lives, beginning with where they are, not where outsiders think they should be. There is a "value added" component of GFW's grants, besides their monetary value, in the form of networking and expertise provided among grantees. This can be as simple as convening grantees, helping to plug them in to larger agendas, and facilitating cross-fertilization of ideas from different regions around the world and from different women's movements.

State of Women's Movements Going Forward

Senior staff of the GFW interviewed for this edition express concern about the rise of extremism in society today – religious, political, and ethnic – that is affecting women, often in places where they are already struggling from poverty and low status. They are also concerned about the backlash that is sometimes directed at women's movements. While this is most certainly an indicator of success and impact, it has the potential to create setbacks.

They also worry that what looks like progress can actually be creating new problems. This is a commonly raised concern associated with globalization (see Women and Economy section). An example of this in India, where the employment of women in more lucrative sectors of the economy has, in some ways, contributed to their exploitation in marriage. Women with earning potential are in high demand in the marriage market, and are pressured to work longer hours for pay while also expected to bear the more traditional burden of unpaid work around the house. This is a common dilemma that accompanies economic progress for women when other social and cultural factors remain the same. Moreover, an Indian woman who finds herself in this double exploitive bind cannot generally leave her situation because of the stigma associated with divorce.

Several strategic priorities of the GFW going forward include more strongly emphasizing public education and awareness of women's issues, linking grantees strategically, holding governments accountable for the implementation

of anti-discriminatory measures, and engaging young feminists.

One of the unique benefits GFW brings to the table is its connection to women whose stories do not make it into national statistics. Within the thousands of grant applications are narratives and valuable qualitative evidence of the situation on the ground for women all around the world, along with a broad spectrum of innovative ideas for bringing about women's empowerment. Getting this information into the larger dialogue will be valuable to the success and inclusivity of women's movements everywhere.

Special Focus: Women in Afghanistan

For some time, Afghanistan has been drawing headlines worldwide on the subject of women's rights. Repressive policies toward women put in place by the Taliban in the 1990s, mixed with famine, drought, and the economic, social, and political collapse of the country caused by decades of war have created a perfect storm for all Afghan citizens – especially women. Recent headlines have brought the subject of women's rights to the forefront again.

Recent Developments

On April 15, 2009, approximately 300 women marched in Kabul to protest the passage of a new family code approved by the Afghani Parliament. They were attacked by counter-protestors shouting misogynistic epithets and hurling stones. The demonstrations came on the heels of the assassination of Sitar Achakzai, a prominent women's rights activist and member of the Kandahar Provincial Council. Achakzai had been a leader of a recent nation-wide strike by women in recognition of International Women's Day. The Taliban took responsibility for her killing.

The Kabul demonstrators were reacting to the new Shia Personal Status Law, passed in April by the legislature and signed into law by President Hamid Karzai.

This new law allows Afghanistan's Shi'ite minority (10-15% of the total population) their own family law code, which would only apply to Shi'ite Afghani citizens. Some of its provisions that have sparked protest and condemnation include:

- A woman must consent to sex on demand with her husband. For a wife to refuse sex for reasons unrelated to health would be considered illegal. This essentially legalizes marital rape.
- A woman must request permission from her husband to leave the house for work or for school. Women are allowed to travel outside the home for "legitimate purposes," a purposely vague exception that most believe will be applied according to conservative religious law and custom.
- A woman must wear make-up if her husband desires, and must wear styles of dress that he determines.

A few of the Code's provisions are an improvement on existing rights for Shia women, in that:

- Women will be allowed to initiate divorce proceedings.
- Women will be allowed to retain custody of children under the age of seven or nine, depending on the gender of the child.
- A husband will be required to provide housing for his wife and family and cannot force them to live with his relatives.

The creation of laws targeting citizens of a specific religious group, let alone singling out women, is in contradiction to Afghanistan's governing constitution. Female members of Parliament have said the law was rushed through without proper review. Although Karzai signed the bill, it is currently under review by the Ministry of Justice.

Human rights advocates fear, however, that Karzai's action on this matter is an indication of the current government's weakness and the Taliban's gaining strength.

Background

The controversy over the new law is just the tip of the iceberg as far as women's status in Afghanistan is concerned. Consider the following:

Afghanistan is a relatively new country with a violent history.

- Because of its key location, it was used for centuries as a pawn in larger regional geostrategic intrigue, primarily between Great Britain and Russia. The British finally prevailed in the early 20th Century and occupied the country. Independence was followed by civil war, and ultimately, by Soviet invasion in an attempt to prop up a tenuous Afghan Communist government. Ten years of destructive fighting with the USSR ended in retreat by the Soviets and return to civil war.
- By 1996, the country was largely under the control of the Taliban, a Sunni Muslim extremist force that turned the clock back on gender relations in Afghanistan. Women, who had occupied positions of power in government and diverse professions, were forced out of public life. They were required to wear the burqa and were forbidden from attending school or traveling outside the home without male chaperones. They were prohibited from interacting with non-relative males, to the extent that many were forced to go without health care of any kind as women doctors ceased to exist. Schools for women were closed; conservative Islamic family law and custom prevailed, meaning forced and early marriage for many girls. Girls and women were publicly executed for violations of gender laws.
- The terrorist attacks on Washington and New York on September 11, 2001 by Al Qaeda operatives were linked to sanctuary and support given to Sunni extremists by the Taliban inside Afghanistan, leading to the U.S.-led NATO invasion of the country in late 2001. A relatively quick defeat of the Taliban in much of the country, including the capital Kabul, brought the installation of U.S.-backed President Hamid Karzai, but left many of the rural, tribal areas under the sway of the Taliban.

- As attention was diverted from the war in Afghanistan by the invasion of Iraq, the Taliban were given the opportunity to regroup, with, many believe, the support of extremist insurgents along the Pakistani border. As the decade has progressed, ground has actually been lost to the Taliban resurgence as Afghans tire of the war and of the presence of Western troops.

Post-Taliban nation-building has proven extraordinarily challenging.

- Parts of the country are not under the control of the government in Kabul. In many places, war lords and tribalism prevail. Different local militias coexist with, fight alongside, and engage in hostilities with American and NATO forces. The security situation is dire, and civilian casualties are commonplace.
- Clerics wield enormous power in the vacuum created by the devastation of near-constant war over the past decades. Extremism is on the rise, especially in rural areas where three-quarters of all Afghans live.
- Poverty is extreme, exacerbated by drought, war, and poor governance. Aid is hard to get in, hard to deliver, and often insufficient. It is plagued by fragmentation and lack of cooperation as well as corruption on the ground. Often, it is even met with hostility as a backlash against foreign presence of any kind grows.
- Life expectancy is in the 40s for men and women; child and infant mortality are among the highest in the developing world.

The impact of war, drought, poverty, and poor governance has been especially harsh for Afghanistan's women.

- Afghan women have the highest maternal mortality rates outside Sub Saharan Africa, ranking second worst in the world with 1 in 8 women dying from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. It is thought that 80% of these deaths are preventable.
- Women in Afghanistan also have some of the highest birth rates in the world, with an average of eight children per mother.
- Some estimates put the percentage of Afghan women who have experienced gender violence of some kind at 80%. It has one of the highest trafficking rates in the world; 60% of all marriages are forced. Half of

- all girls age 16 and under are married, often to settle parental debts.
- Up to 88% of Afghan women are illiterate. Eighty-five percent have had no formal schooling, and 74% of girls who do attend school drop out by the fifth grade. In rural areas, it has been estimated that only 1% of girls attend school.
 - Because of years of war, many Afghan women are widows. In some places, women heads of households are not allowed to work, relegating them to dependence on male relatives or abject poverty and starvation.
 - Women's unpaid work in the care economy in Afghanistan is extraordinarily difficult, with only 22% of the population able to conveniently access clean water and 30% able to conveniently access improved sanitation.
 - Women regained some rights and status following the invasion in 2001. A new constitution gave women the vote and established quotas for female representation in Parliament. An equal rights clause of sorts was included stating that "men and women have equal rights and responsibility before the law." However, many experts note that the concept of "law" was left open to interpretation, and in many cases has come to mean religious law which is discriminatory toward women.
 - Afghanistan is, ironically, a signatory to CEDAW, to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to the International Criminal Court. However, real commitment to human rights protection has been uneven to nonexistent in practice.
 - Women lack legal recourse for violations of their rights as few mechanisms exist to protect or promote their interests. The government does now have a Ministry of Women's Affairs, but this body lacks enforcement powers. Up to 98% of women do not possess official government identification papers, a necessity for mobility, especially in war time.

public execution by Taliban firing squad of a young couple that attempted to elope. There have also been instances of journalists jailed and press outlets shut down on charges of "blasphemy," including commentary on women's issues.

But amid the grim news, there are glimmers of hope. Women are standing up in numerous ways. Battered women's shelters are opening with practitioners who understand the importance of treating women within the context of their families and traditions. Women-run government development councils are springing up, as detailed in several recent articles about progress in Bamian. Facing threats and intimidation, nearly half of all voters in the last Presidential election were women.

One of the most poignant examples of the tragedy that is unfolding as well as the resilience of the human spirit in Afghanistan can be found in the recent (November 2008) acid attacks at the Mirwais girls' school in Kandahar. Eleven girls and four teachers were attacked one morning by extremists bearing spray bottles of toxic acid. It is said that the attacks were preceded by a public campaign in mosques featuring large posters that read "Don't Let Your Girls Go to School."

Disfigured and afraid, the girls were kept home by their families in the weeks after the attacks. But community leaders were able to convince parents, teachers, and students to return to the school in a show of solidarity. One student interviewed told Dexter Filkins of the *New York Times*, "my parents told me to keep coming to school, even if I am killed."

Going Forward

Human rights advocates and activists worldwide are increasingly alarmed by the situation in Afghanistan. Besides the recent protest violence, there have been several high profile murders of women's rights activists, as well as a

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PBS Frontline/World

South Africa: An Everyday Crime

This video clip documents the work done at the Thuthuzela Rape Crisis Center in South Africa. In 2006, there were nearly 55,000 officially reported rapes in South Africa, though the South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Offenders estimates that only 1 in 20 rapes are actually reported.

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2008/01/south_africa_ev.html

*Note: The topic of this video may be disturbing to some young viewers.

Run, Lornah, Run

Lornah Kiplagat, one of Kenya's first great women marathoners, has used her prize money to found the first high altitude training camp for women in Kenya. This video clip explores the sense of independence the women there experience as they are freed from their daily household obligations and experience the freedom to dedicate their lives to training.

<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/>

Chile: Karina's Story

This documentary follows the life of Karina, a Chilean transgendered woman; the video also explores the difficulties faced by other sexual minorities in Chile.

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2006/06/chile_karinas_s.html

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WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Classroom Companion

Classroom Companion

This companion document to the Issue in Focus provides educators with guidance on ways to incorporate the content into classroom teaching. This component is geared toward grade 6-12 teachers, with connections across subjects and disciplines.

Contents of this Classroom Companion include:

- Student Readings and Discussion Questions
- Lesson Ideas and Curriculum
- Additional Resources
- National Standards

Student Readings and Discussion Questions:

Below are student readings that provide some insight into the global status of women today and discuss some of the most relevant issues covered in the Issue in Focus. Each article is aimed at different age groups or reading levels, and is followed by some selected discussion questions.

Advanced:

“CEDAW – The U.S. Controversy” – An analysis of why the United States has not ratified CEDAW (p. 107)

Intermediate:

“Rwanda’s Women – Leading the Way” – Rwanda is the nation with the highest percentage of women in Parliament at 56% (p. 109)

Beginner:

“Profile – Wangari Maathai” – profile of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and her work for the environment and human rights (p. 111)

CEDAW—The U.S. Controversy

CEDAW requires signatories to commit to improving the status of women and end discrimination against women worldwide. It would establish legal functions that would hold countries accountable to the United Nations. UN committees would report on each nation's progress through comprehensive reports done every four years.

The controversy over CEDAW in the U.S. is largely centered on the issues of abortion, prostitution, sexual preference, women in the military, maternity benefits, and the federal government's role in enforcing rights.

In 2002, U.S. legislators proposed a series of amendments to CEDAW that would only apply to the United States' version. These changes, called RUDs – for Reservations, Understandings, and Declarations – stipulated that the treaty could not compel the government to allow paid maternity leave or force women to serve in military combat.

Furthermore, the RUDs stipulated that the government would not provide federal funding for abortions as a reproductive right, saying that CEDAW, if ratified, should not “create any right to abortion and in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning.”

Although the Obama Administration has said that it will support the ratification of CEDAW with the 2002 RUDs in place, the Department of Justice is currently conducting a review to determine whether CEDAW should be submitted to the Senate with or without the RUDs.

Liberal advocates would like a “clean” CEDAW ratified – without any RUDs attached. Conservative opponents

would prefer to keep the RUDs in place or resist ratification altogether.

CEDAW's opponents argue that its language is too vague and comprehensive. They believe the U.S. Constitution provides sufficient human rights protections and object to the idea of international law superseding U.S. laws. They also fear CEDAW would provide for the decriminalization of prostitution and open the door to legalized marriage for lesbians, which could translate into legalized marriage for all homosexuals.

Moreover, CEDAW might pave the way for mandated maternity leave benefits, which many business interests consider too expensive to implement. Military leaders argue CEDAW would make women serving in combat compulsory.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the United States need to do to ratify CEDAW?
2. What are RUDs? What issues do the RUDs address? Why are these issues controversial?
3. What is the role of the Department of Justice in the federal government?
4. Re-read the section where CEDAW defines discrimination against women. Come up with specific examples of discrimination, given this definition. Do you agree or disagree that the definition is too vague?

5. If discrimination were to be defined as in CEDAW, how would governments guard and enforce against this kind of discrimination from happening?

“Committed to ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development”

- Rwandan Constitution

Rwanda’s Women – Leading the Way

For most people, Rwanda brings to mind the horrifying genocide that occurred in 1994. Today, Rwanda can be seen as a leader in **gender parity in government**. In 2008, women were elected to 56% of the seats in Parliament, making it the world leader in female democratic representation.

This dramatic milestone is no coincidence. Many post-conflict countries, especially those moving from authoritarian to democratic forms of governance, are increasing female political leadership by setting **quotas for elected offices**. This strategy has been used in some other post-conflict countries as well, such as Algeria, Iraq, South Africa, and East Timor.

Following the genocide in 1994, women and girls made up 70% of Rwanda’s remaining total population. Women were forced to rebuild their families, communities, and country by becoming economic providers and civil society leaders. They have had to learn new skills and enter new fields of work, which in turn, has empowered them run for and get elected to offices of political leadership. When it was time for the transitional government to draft a new constitution in 2000, 3 of the 12 commission members were women. Strongly backed by the leadership of Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame, the constitution includes a commitment to gender equality by ensuring women will hold at least 30% of posts in “decision-making organs.”

Rwanda also created an electoral structure to support this commitment to female representation. The Senate is composed of 26 members, of whom 30% must be women.

Senators gain seats either by election or presidential appointment. In the lower chamber of Parliament, 24 of the 80 seats are reserved for women, who run for office in women-only elections – that means that only women run, and only women can vote. These women-only elections are coordinated by grassroots women’s councils. In the 2008 election, 45 of the available 80 seats went to women – 24 in women-only elections and 21 in openly contested elections!

Rwanda’s female Parliamentarians have also joined together to form a women’s caucus, working together regardless of party affiliation. By applying a lens of gender sensitivity to the Parliament, these women have reviewed existing laws and introduced amendments to discriminatory laws. One of their most significant achievements was the repeal in 1999 of laws that prevented women from inheriting land, thus paving the way for continued economic growth and freedom for Rwanda’s women.

Below is a complete listing of countries that have put quotas into their Constitutions for female representation in government at either the national or sub-national level. For more information about these countries and the subject of female governmental quotas, go to the website of the Global Database of Quotas for Women: <http://www.quotaproject.org/index.cfm>.

Rwanda	Lesotho	Slovenia
Argentina	Honduras	Korea
South Africa	Taiwan	Sierra Lenoe
Guyana	Serbia	Palestine
Burundi	Portugal	Paraguay
Tanzania	Philippines	Kenya
Peru	Dominican Republic	Brazil
Ecuador	Bangaldesh	India
Afghanistan	France	Somalia
Namibia	Mauritania	Nepal
Iraq	Greece	
Uganda	Bosnia/Herzegovina	

Discussion Questions:

1. What percent of Rwanda's Parliament are women? Are there any other countries in the world with this many women holding democratically elected office?
2. Why are there so many women in Rwanda's Parliament?
3. Why have women been so important in Rwanda since 1994?
4. Do you think it is important for women to have a role in government? What kinds of laws would they pass that would be different from laws that men might pass?
5. Go to the website listed above, and read more about the effectiveness of quotas for women in government. Does it surprise you that the United States is not on the list of countries above? Should the United States set quotas for women's participation in government? Why or why not?

“The movement started as a tree planting campaign, but it is a little more than just the planting of trees. It’s planting of ideas, it’s giving them reasons why they should protect their environmental rights, and giving them reasons why they should protect their women’s rights.”

- Wangari Maathai

Profile – Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, is a noted environmental and human rights activist who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya in 1976. She was born in a rural area of Kenya, growing up among rolling hills and forests. She received her bachelors and masters degrees in the United States, and later earned her Ph.D. in Germany – she is the first woman in East or Central Africa to obtain a doctorate. After returning to Kenya and becoming a professor at the University of Nairobi, she was shocked to note the amount of deforestation across Kenya’s landscape. She saw that women were impacted the most, walking farther and farther to find firewood, lacking enough clean drinking water for their families, and struggling to grow crops in eroded and nutrient-poor soil. She founded the Green Belt Movement to plant trees to protect the soil and restore the forests. She enlisted women to plant these trees, as a means of providing income to women, but also because she wanted to encourage them to see planting trees as just the first step in making positive change for the environment, their families, and their communities. The Green Belt Movement organized workshops on civic education; it encouraged the women to look for the cultural, political, and economic policies and practices that were the root causes of environmental problems, and to take action to address those root causes.

As the movement began to grow and more women became involved, they came into direct conflict with Kenya’s corrupt government. Maathai led the fight against a project to build a skyscraper in Uhuru Park, a popular park in central

Nairobi; she led a hunger strike for the release of political prisoners jailed by the government; she also advocated for democratic reforms to be brought to Kenya. Finally, a new leader was elected in 2002, and Wangari Maathai was elected to Parliament and as Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. In 2004, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and continues to work with the Green Belt Movement and to advocate internationally for environmental and human rights. Since its founding, the Green Belt Movement has planted over 40 million trees in Kenya.

Watch the documentary, *Taking Root*, or read her autobiography, *Unbowed*, to find out more about the life and struggle of Wangari Maathai.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/AmericanLife/2009-04-20-voa47.cfm>

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html

<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the Green Belt Movement and what have they achieved?
2. Why did Wangari Maathai decide to focus on women to be leaders of the Green Belt Movement?
3. How has the Green Belt Movement improved women's lives in Kenya?
4. Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. Are you surprised that she won an award for peace instead of for the environment? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree with Maathai's strategy to connect her activism for the environment with her struggle for democratic and human rights?

Lesson Ideas and Curriculum

This portion of the guide contains some suggestions for possible lesson plans and activities to teach students about the global status of women today - across the disciplines. For complete lesson plans, see the recommended curriculum units listed at the end of this section.

Social Studies/History

- This edition of the World Savvy Monitor focuses on women. Using the **annotated timeline** and the “**Women in Power and Decision-Making**” section of this edition, draw a timeline that illustrates major milestones around the world relating to women’s suffrage. What correlations or patterns do you see? Where does the United States fit into these patterns, compared with other countries?
- For a more detailed investigation of women’s suffrage, look at the issue in the context of the rise of **nation-states** around the world. Create a chart or graphic timeline with three columns. In the first column, students can list selected countries, in the second column the date of universal women’s suffrage in those countries, and in the third column, the date in which this country became independent or became a nation-state. Notice that for the U.S., there is a large gap between independent statehood and women’s suffrage, whereas for other nations (Kenya and India are just two examples) women gained suffrage almost immediately upon the country’s independence. After making their charts, have students discuss the

correlations or patterns they see. Discuss what factors led to these patterns.

- **Foreign policy** – Should women’s rights be a key negotiating point for the U.S. in its relations with other governments? How could such a set of policies be developed and implemented? Can the U.S. be considered a leader in international affairs if CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) remains un-ratified?
- **Government** – Constitutional democratic government is the hallmark of the Modern Age. The United States has been the global standard in this type of government since its inception. With respect to women’s rights, however, other nations have now exceeded the U.S. in doing two things: 1) establishing constitutional quotas for female representation at national and sub-national levels of legislative bodies and 2) ratifying “the international bill of rights for women,” i.e., CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination on Discrimination Against Women). Discuss what makes constitutional law different from other types of laws. Research and discuss the meaning of complying with international law. What happens when a country’s laws contradicts international laws? What should happen? Should the United States submit to international laws? Should countries be allowed to make their own laws, even in violation of international laws?

English/Language Arts

- **Creative writing** – Do a “found poem” based on a famous speech by a woman. For example, take a speech like Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman,” cut up the words and have students create their own poem from the key words in the speech. Other famous feminist writers and thinkers may include Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Gloria Steinem, Eve Ensler, Carol Gilligan, to name a few.
- Have students do a video montage with the speech of a feminist thinker as the soundtrack. As an example, see the We Roy website to watch a production using a speech by Arundhati Roy: <http://weroy.org/>
- **Expository analytical writing** – Have students write a persuasive essay about why the U.S. should or should not ratify CEDAW. Have them choose one of the following two aspects of the arguments. Advanced students may tackle both areas: 1) supporting women in particular, as an issue of human rights, or 2) taking leadership and setting the standard for the international community.
- **Modern literature** – Analyze the work of literature your class is currently reading from a feminist perspective. Who are the female characters and what are their occupations? What is expected from them compared to the male characters in the story? What time period is the story taking place in? Analyze the characters’ personalities – are women being portrayed as emotional and less logical than the male characters? Who handles the money and who handles the children? Compare the story’s characters’ gender roles to those which students witness in their own lives. What accounts for the differences and/or similarities?

Science

- **Health** – Women face particular challenges in health due to the fact that they are at the nexus of family planning and care-giving.
- Although far fewer women and infants die from pregnancy and childbirth than a century ago, the numbers remain staggeringly high and much of the biology behind the risks remains intractable. The

rates of maternal mortality between women in the developed world and women in the developing world has been termed by agencies like UNICEF as “the greatest health divide in the world.” Prenatal care can increase the detection rates for pregnancy related diseases, but some are not curable.

Preeclampsia is one such condition, and is one of the most dangerous pregnancy complications. Research what preeclampsia is, its symptoms, and the current interventions. In doing so, students will learn about the connections amongst the **respiratory, circulatory and renal systems of the body**, as well as a common detection process in medicine which is tracking a substance (such as a protein or increased white blood cells) that indicates something may not be right. In the case of preeclampsia, that substance is a protein in the urine. There is no cure for preeclampsia, but there are interventions whose benefits increase with early detection.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that for optimal health, infants should be breast-fed for one year. The World Health Organization advises women in developing countries to breast-feed for two years, given the potential challenges in ensuring a clean water source. Have students map out in months how long a woman is directly responsible for fetal and infant care (i.e., 9 months for gestation plus 12 or 24 for breast-feeding). Make a chart that compares women in the U.S. and women in the developing world. Next, have students calculate how much of a woman’s lifetime is involved, given the average birth rates for the U.S. and for a specific developing country. Compare those numbers. Finally, compare those numbers with maternal mortality rates, as found in the Monitor in “Women and Health.” This exercise should illustrate one of the main reasons women in developing countries face exponentially greater debilitation than women in developed countries by keeping certain variables (fetal gestation, women’s participation in breast-feeding) fixed, while other

variables change (amount of time breast-feeding, number of children).

- **The Environment** – “Women hold up half the sky” and Wangari Maathai is an example of how women can use their particular power to make an impact on environmental conservation. Have students read the article “Profile – Wangari Maathai,” as either the starting point or culminating exercise of a deeper exploration of the science of deforestation and climate change. What were the impacts of deforestation in Kenya? How were women uniquely affected by this? Why are native trees important? Have students look around their own neighborhood and community to see how many trees there are. Which ones are native and which ones are non-native? Is there a dearth of trees in your community; if so, what are the impacts?
- Create an infographic with women at the center of a community. Connect that center with other areas of life and illustrate how those connections can have an impact on key environmental issues, such as deforestation.
- If possible, organize a tree planting campaign. For helpful tips and ideas, see: http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/takingroot/resources/takingroot_actionguide.pdf.

Mathematics

- **Know the numbers** – Research gender statistics for US, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Choose a set of criteria such as women in executive leadership positions at private companies, women’s salaries compared the men’s, women in higher education, women in political leadership, etc. Create graphs of different kinds to illustrate the comparisons.
- **Track a trend** – Birthrates and immigration rates have a direct impact on the well-being of the economy. An economy needs to meet demand, and increasing birth and immigration rates translate into more “mouths to feed.” But an economy also relies on individuals to be able to meet those needs, thus more “hands on deck” to feed those “mouths.” Track birthrates, immigration rates, and population growth for specific countries. Calculate rates of change (percentages) from year to year. Is the rate of change faster? Slower? What implications might be inferred from these changes?

- **Analyzing thematic maps** – Use the book, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, as a way to have students analyze global statistics and thematic maps. Thematic maps and illustrations in the book include nations that have ratified CEDAW, nations with the highest and lowest life expectancy for women, women’s political participation and more. After sharing and discussing several of the maps from the book, have students create their own – by first picking a statistic affecting women globally (see Women and Education or Women in Power and Decision-Making sections of this edition for interesting statistics), and then using a world map to design a colorful and effective way to show that statistic.

Recommended Curriculum Units

These lessons and curricula offer an in-depth look at various issues in Iran, and offer full lessons ready for the classroom, complete with handouts and instructions.

International Museum of Women

IMOW is a groundbreaking social change museum that inspires global action and amplifies the voices of women worldwide through global online exhibitions, history, the arts and cultural programs that educate, create dialogue and build community. Check their education section for some excellent lessons to accompany their online exhibitions – topics include Human Rights, Women of Courage, Global Beauty, and more.

http://www.imow.org/education/classroom_curricula/index

Women in World History

This site offers a variety of resources to learn about women’s history in a global context. The site offers lessons on a variety of topics such as suffrage, women in the Industrial Revolution, Mayan weavers, and women’s rights in ancient Egypt. The site also includes essays, biographies of famous women, and book reviews.

<http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/index.html>

Muslim Women Through Time, PBS

No country, culture, or group stays the same indefinitely. National origin, family background, economic levels, and historical context all help determine opportunities people have in life. Muslim women are subject to these factors as well. In this lesson, students will learn how and why the role of women in Islamic cultures has evolved.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/women/lesson2.html>

Examining Patriarchal and Matriarchal Society and Culture

This lesson accompanies the PBS Wide Angle film, **Ladies First**, about the women of Rwanda who are leading the country's healing process. The lesson explores different perspectives regarding patriarchal and matriarchal cultures.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/classroom/3lp4.html>

A Women's Worth: Examining the Changing Roles of Women in Cultures Around the World, NYTimes

Learning Network

In this lesson, students will consider what they already know about the role of women in various countries and professions, and prepare for the creation of a documentary highlighting the way traditional roles of women are changing in a variety of countries. They then "pitch" their documentary plans to potential "financiers" by explaining the value of such a film.

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20050216wednesday.html>

The Role of Women in the United States and Kenya,

Frontline World

Using a PBS Frontline World video about Kenyan distance runner Lornah Kiplagat, this lesson examines the differences in gender roles in United States and Kenya, particularly in balancing a family with a career. Students also examine and discuss gender roles in their own families and how gender roles have changed over time.

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/educators/culture_kenya.html

Bride Kidnapping and the Role of Women in Kyrgyzstan,

Frontline World

This lesson examines whether bride kidnapping should be considered a human rights violation or a complex cultural tradition. It includes an accompanying video from PBS:

Frontline World.

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/educators/geography_kyrgyzstan.html

Additional Resources

Books and Readings – Non-Fiction

The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World, Joni Seager

This reference book presents global statistics on women alongside colorful thematic maps illustrating women's lives across the world today. Great visuals and thematic discussion of women's issues makes this a great resource for students and classrooms. Maps and statistics include size of family households, education issues, the global sex trade, migrant workers, poverty, women's political participation, and much more.

Unbowed: My Autobiography, Wangari Maathai

Maathai's memoir of her childhood, her academic career, her marriage and children, and her life's work leading the Green Belt Movement to fight for environmental and human rights in Kenya.

From Outrage to Courage: Women Taking Action for Health and Justice, Anne Firth Murray

In this book, Murray tackles health issues from prenatal care to challenges faced by aging women. Looking at how gender inequality affects basic nutrition, Murray makes clear the issues are political more than they are medical. *From Outrage to Courage* shows how women are organizing the world over. Women's courage to transform their situations and communities provides inspiration and models for change, from China to India, from Indonesia to Kenya.

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time, Greg Mortenson, David Oliver Relin

This book tells the story of Mortenson, a mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built 55 schools – especially for girls – that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. A new version of this book for youth is now available as well.

Global Women: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild

The editors have gathered some 15 essays on aspects of “the female underside of globalization” – e.g., Filipina housekeepers in Hong Kong, Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, sexual slaves in Thailand, Vietnamese contract brides—mostly written by academics working in the field, but largely jargon-free. While one small book can't say everything about a major global phenomenon, Ehrenreich and Hochschild have at least brought attention to these women's plight.

The Global Women's Movement: Issues and Strategies for the New Century, by Peggy Antrobus

This overview of the international women's movement by the well-known feminist activist Peggy Antrobus asks where are women now – particularly in the Third World – in the

struggle against gender inequality? What are the issues – from poverty to sexual and reproductive health to the environment – that they face in different parts of the world? What challenges confront the women’s movement and what strategies are needed?

Books – Youth Fiction

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind, Suzanne Fisher Staples

Life is both sweet and cruel to strong-willed young Shabanu, whose home is the windswept Cholistan Desert of Pakistan. The second daughter in a family with no sons, she’s been allowed freedoms forbidden to most Muslim girls. But when a tragic encounter with a wealthy and powerful landowner ruins the marriage plans of her older sister, Shabanu is called upon to sacrifice everything she’s dreamed of. Should she do what is necessary to uphold her family’s honor – or listen to the stirrings of her own heart? For ages 12 and up.

The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl, by Ma Yan and Pierre Haski

In a drought-stricken corner of rural China, an education can be the difference between a life of crushing poverty and the chance for a better future. But money is scarce, and the low wages paid for backbreaking work aren’t always enough to pay school fees. Ma Yan’s heart-wrenching, honest diary chronicles her struggle to escape hardship and bring prosperity to her family through her persistent, sometimes desperate, attempts to continue her schooling. Great for middle school readers.

Does My Head Look Big in This? by Randa Abdel-Fattah
Sixteen-year-old Amal makes the decision to start wearing the hijab full-time and everyone has a reaction. Her parents, her teachers, her friends, people on the street. But she stands by her decision to embrace her faith and all that it is, even if it does make her a little different from everyone else. Can she handle the taunts, the prejudice of her classmates, and still attract the cutest boy in school?

*Note about books for young adults: these are a handful of the many quality books dealing with contemporary issues for young women and girls. For more great fiction reads on young women across cultures, check these booklists:

Children’s Cooperative Book Center:

<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailLists.asp?idBookListCat=4>

ALA Growing Up Around the World:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/compubs/booklists/growingupwrlld/GrowingUpAroundWorld.cfm>

Films

Iron Ladies of Liberia

After 14 years of a brutal civil war, Liberia elects its first female president – Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, nicknamed the Iron Lady. This film follows her first year in office, as she struggles to rebuild a war-ravaged country, fight rampant corruption and prevent a descent back into war, along with her predominately female cabinet.

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies/>

Accompanying lesson plans: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies/classroom.html>

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ment, PBS: WIDE ANGLE profiles children in Japan, Kenya, Benin, Brazil, Romania, and India who have managed to enroll in the first year of primary school – in most cases despite great odds. Though not specifically about women's issues, the stories that profile girls highlight some of the challenges the world's girls face when they enroll in primary education. Also look for the follow-up film, Back to School, which follows the seven students two years after they first began going to school.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/time-for-school-introduction/918/>

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Websites and Multimedia

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<http://www.piwdw.org/>

National Standards

Activities described in this Classroom Companion correspond to the following national standards from McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning).

Social Studies

World History Standards:

Era 8: A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement, 1900-1945

- Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th Century

Era 9: The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes

- Understands major global trends since World War II

World History Across the Eras

- Understands long-term changes and recurring patterns in world history

World History Topics:

- Cultural continuity and change
- Cultural perspectives
- International diplomacy and relations
- Family and gender roles
- Role of women
- Suffrage movements
- Women's movement for civil rights and equal opportunities

Historical Understanding:

- Understand and know how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns
- Understands the historical perspective

Civics Standards:

What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights
- Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Civics Topics:

- Human and civil rights
- Impact of world political, demographic, and environmental trends
- International diplomacy and relations

English/Language Arts

Writing:

1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
2. Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
3. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading:

5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
7. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Science

Life Sciences:

- Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment

Topics:

- Environmental Issues
- Conservation of Matter and Energy
- Interdependence of Organisms
- People in Science
- Populations and Ecosystems

Mathematics

- 6: Understands and applies basic and advanced concepts of statistics and data analysis
- 9: Understands the general nature and uses of mathematics

WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



World Savvy Salon Guide

World Savvy Salon Guide

See the home page of the Monitor website for information on why and how to host a World Savvy Salon – the book club for the 21st Century! See also the Classroom Companion Guide in this edition for original articles and discussion ideas for lifelong learning across all disciplines.

Conversation Starters

1. The issues facing women in developed and developing countries diverge; yet there is also a fair amount of common ground. Consider the concept of solidarity among women's movements and how progress made in different areas affects progress in others. How can this common ground be highlighted and inclusivity enhanced?
2. Discuss the two primary motivators behind the imperative to empower women – the human rights component and the pragmatic/utilitarian angle emphasizing the untapped potential of women in development and global problem solving. How can these approaches be better integrated in policy and messaging? How do they appeal to different constituents?
3. Among the 12 Critical Areas of Concern contained in the UN Beijing Platform examined here, how would you prioritize them? Can they even be separated from each other?
4. Consider the statistics you read throughout this edition of the Monitor. What surprised you the most; what do you feel is underreported in the mainstream media? What are the shortcomings of using numbers to illustrate the status of women in the world? What types of information are not captured in quantitative data?
5. What has happened to the concept of feminism – why do many young women believe in gender equality yet not identify themselves as feminists? What about men and boys? Think generationally and consider the “branding issues” of women's movements.
6. What can individuals do in the context of their own families, as well as their workplaces, schools, and communities to advance gender equality? How can you help to address both de facto (subtle, attitudinal) and de jure (legal, policy-based) gender discrimination?

Additional Resources

Muslim Women Through Time

No country, culture, or group stays the same indefinitely. National origin, family background, economic levels, and historical context all help determine opportunities people have in life. Muslim women are subject to these factors as well. This PBS resource explores what factors determine the changing roles of women in the Middle East and Muslim Countries.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/women/index.html>

A Woman Among Warlords

This PBS Wide Angle episode profiles 27 year-old Malalai Joya, one of Afghanistan's most famous (and controversial) women since 2003 when she challenged the power of warlords in national politics. Great background for the case study on the current status of women in Afghanistan in this edition of the Monitor.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/a-woman-among-warlords/introduction/65/>

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The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World, Joni Seager

This reference book presents global statistics on women alongside colorful thematic maps illustrating women's lives across the world today, including the size of family households, education issues, the global sex trade, migrant workers, poverty, women's political participation, and much more.

Unbowed: My Autobiography, Wangari Maathai

Maathai's memoir of her childhood, her academic career, her marriage and children, and her life's work leading the Green Belt Movement to fight for environmental and human rights in Kenya.

From Outrage to Courage: Women Taking Action for Health and Justice, Anne Firth Murray

In this book, Murray tackles health issues from prenatal care to challenges faced by aging women. Looking at how gender inequality affects basic nutrition, Murray makes clear the issues are political more than they are medical. From *Outrage to Courage* shows how women are organizing the world over. Women's courage to transform their situations and communities provides inspiration and models for change, from China to India, from Indonesia to Kenya.

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time, Greg Mortenson, David Oliver Relin

This book tells the story of Mortenson, a mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2,

was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built 55 schools – especially for girls – that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. A new version of this book for youth is now available as well.

Global Women: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild

The editors have gathered some 15 essays on aspects of “the female underside of globalization” – e.g., Filipina housekeepers in Hong Kong, Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, sexual slaves in Thailand, Vietnamese contract brides. They are mostly written by academics working in the field, but are largely jargon-free. While one small book can't say everything about a major global phenomenon, Ehrenreich and Hochschild have at least brought attention to these women's plight.

The Global Women's Movement: Issues and Strategies for the New Century, by Peggy Antrobus

This overview of the international women's movement by the well-known feminist activist Peggy Antrobus asks where are women now – particularly in the Third World – in the struggle against gender inequality? What are the issues – from poverty to sexual and reproductive health to the environment – that they face in different parts of the world? What challenges confront the women's movement and what strategies are needed?

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Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch is one of the world's leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights; one of their primary areas of concern is women's rights. By focusing international attention where human rights are violated, HRW gives voice to the oppressed and hold oppressors accountable for their crimes. Their rigorous, objective investigations and strategic, targeted advocacy build intense pressure for action and raise the cost of human rights abuse.

<http://www.hrw.org/en/category/topic/women's-rights>

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<http://www.piwdw.org/>

Your On Ramp

An online resource for women in career transition with information on networking and job opportunities.

<http://www.youonramp.com/>

Not For Sale

This site with accompanying book and documentary film addresses the issue of human trafficking affecting vulnerable people around the world, 80% of them women and girls.

<http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/about/mission/>

<http://www.notforsalefilm.com/>

WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Update: Human Migration



Photo courtesy of Jonathan McIntosh.

Update: Human Migration

Snapshots: Migration Issues in 2009

China: In early February 2009, a survey conducted by China's Central Rural Work Leading Group estimated that 20 million migrant workers have lost their jobs during the economic downturn. This number is three times larger than previous estimates and would imply that 15% of the total migrant pool in China is now unemployed. Such high unemployment figures have led to fears of social unrest.

Great Britain: Tensions between foreign workers and Britons have been heightened as the global economic recession continues.

- On January 28, 2009, protests broke out at the Lindsey Oil Refinery, owned by oil giant Total and located in Lincolnshire; unemployed workers were demonstrating against the company's use of foreign contractors. The protests quickly spread throughout Great Britain's energy sector. The dispute was resolved on February 4, but was significant in that it highlighted growing tensions between foreign and domestic workers as the economy continues to decline.
- Great Britain's home secretary Jacqui Smith announced February 22, 2009 that tighter restrictions will be placed on immigration to the U.K.
- The new regulations, which Smith says are in response to the "current economic circumstances," stipulate that skilled jobs in the U.K. cannot be offered to immigrants unless the job has first been advertised to British workers; furthermore, non-EU workers must

have a master's degree (as opposed to the previous requirement of a bachelor's degree) and a previous salary of the equivalent 20,000 pounds if they come to Great Britain without first obtaining employment.

- The policy change is expected to lower immigration by 12,000 people a year.

South Africa: In early April 2009, South Africa announced that it would offer Zimbabweans six-month permits that will allow Zimbabweans to work and access healthcare and education services in South Africa. It is estimated that three million Zimbabweans have crossed the border to South Africa in order to escape economic and humanitarian crises, as well as human rights abuses. It is hoped that the new permits will reduce the number of Zimbabweans seeking political asylum. Under current regulations, those receiving asylum cannot return to their home country. According to South African Home Affairs Director General of Immigration Services Jackie MacKay, "Most Zimbabweans are not asylum-seekers, they are economic migrants."

Italy: In recent months, controversy has surrounded Italy over its treatment of immigrants seeking to illegally enter the country. Italy is a primary destination for African migrants hoping to reach Europe via the dangerous Mediterranean crossing from North Africa to Europe.

- In late January 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released statements in which it expressed concern over the treatment of illegal immigrants being detained on the Italian island of Lampedusa. The detention center

there has a capacity of 850, but as of late January, was housing nearly 2,000 migrants. The day after these statements were released, an estimated 700 of these migrants escaped from the detention center and staged protests against the conditions under which they were being held. As a result of a policy implemented in December of 2008, migrants seeking asylum are sent to Lampedusa, whereas in the past, they would have been sent to the mainland.

- After a four-day stand-off with Malta, Italy agreed on April 19, 2009, to take in 140 migrants who had been rescued by a cargo ship. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini indicated that Italy's decision to take in the migrants was for purely "humanitarian reasons" and did not set a precedent.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that in 2008, over 31,000 migrants made the journey from Africa to the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Rohingya Burmese Migrants Mistreated by Thai

Authorities: On January 23, 2009, Thailand stated that 126 Rohingya Burmese asylum-seekers had been sent back out to sea. The Thai military's policy of towing caught Rohingya migrants to sea and setting them adrift on motor-less boats with little food and water has been widely condemned by the international community. Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva appears to have little control over the actions of the local military units that are carrying out the mistreatment. The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group that is not officially recognized by the Burmese government and suffers from religious persecution and limits on their ability to work and travel.

Snapshot: Migration and the United States

Deportation Policy: Documents released in early February 2009 revealed that immigration officials have not focused deportation efforts on immigrants with criminal records. Immigration officials had previously told Congress that they would target the most threatening immigrants – criminals and terrorist suspects – but appear to have instead concentrated on immigrants that proved to be easier targets. Most of those arrested for deportation had no criminal records and some did not even have deportation orders against them. Largely in response to these reports, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced

in March that it would issue new guidelines in coming months that will direct local law enforcement officials to refocus deportation efforts on illegal immigrants with criminal records.

Obama Administration on Immigration Reform:

President Obama announced in April that despite the challenges presented by the global economic crisis, his administration intends to reform the immigration system in 2009. The targeted reforms include a path for illegal immigrants to gain legal status. These efforts will be helped by an accord between the country's two main labor organizations, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, who announced that they would join forces for the first time in support of an overhaul of the immigration system. The organizations support legalizing the status of illegal immigrants already in the United States and oppose any new large programs that would bring immigrants into the United States on temporary work visas.

Changing Immigrant Trends: A report released by the Pew Hispanic Center found that since 2003, the number of United States-born children of illegal immigrants has rapidly increased. The report also noted that illegal immigrants to the United States are more geographically dispersed than in the past and are more likely to live in two-parent households than are United States-born citizens and legal immigrants.

U.S. Army Recruiting Immigrants: The United States army announced in February that it will begin accepting immigrants with temporary visas. This will be the first time since the Vietnam War that it has adopted this policy. Once in the army, immigrants will be offered accelerated citizenship. Since many immigrants holding temporary visas have been granted visas as a result of their education or skills, the defense department hopes that the new program will help fill voids in skilled posts such as medical care and language interpretation.