

## Unit 2: Gender Equality Issues

### Learning Objectives

#### How does gender translate into access and respect?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the historical source of the discrepancies of power between genders;
- Understand in what ways resource allocation is different among men and women;
- Understand how women in decision making positions trickles down to all levels of opportunities for women and children, and overall development.

### Introduction and Overview

Through discrepancies in access to resources and education, to disparities in opportunities professionally, politically and otherwise, women are often disadvantaged in practice and spirit, which threatening their ability to grow and prosper, or meet their potential.

### Access to Resources

While many women experience unequal access to resources, the magnitude of the problem varies with the level of development. In some African and Middle Eastern countries, inheritance laws discriminate against women, and historically European Salic Law states that no portion of the inheritance shall come to a woman: but the whole inheritance of the land shall come to the male sex. The patriarchal nature of some societies means that in the event of a husband's death, the family's property, including land, is automatically inherited by the deceased's male relatives or by his eldest son. The widow in such a situation is divorced from ownership of the

family's property and the decision-making is considered the right of men. Many women work on the land, which is their main source of economic activity; their exclusion from land ownership and inability to contribute to decision-making about the use of the land is a factor in the continuing high rates of poverty amongst women. Women are poorer than men not only because they are often denied equal rights, do not have access to education and opportunities and, generally, do not have the same entitlements as men, but because they also carry the responsibility of reproductive and family care, which is entirely unpaid labor.

## Education

### Box 6: 2007 Girls Education Enrollment Share

<i>Region</i>	<i>Girls Enrollment Share Primary</i>	<i>Girls Enrollment Share Secondary</i>
East Asia Pacific	47	48
Europe and Central Asia	48	48
Latin America and Caribbean	48	51
MENA	48	47
South Asia	47	48
SubSaharan Africa	47	44
High Income Countries	49	49

Education is a prerequisite for better employment opportunities but, in most developing countries, the illiteracy rate is higher among women than men. With the idea of a male child as the natural heir to the family often accepted as the norm in many cultures, the educational needs of a boy child take precedence over that of a girl child when family resources are limited. Girls' education and the promotion of gender equality in education are critical to development and policies and actions that do not address gender disparities miss critical development opportunities.

Mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities. A mother with at least a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries, each additional year of formal education completed by a

mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year. Education also has implications for access to decision-making positions.

### **Box 7: Millennium Development Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

The **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** are eight international development goals that all 192 UN member states and several international organizations, including the World Bank, have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. Third among the goals is to promote gender equality and empower women

**Target** **by** **2005:**  
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. While most of the Millennium Development Goals face a deadline of 2015, the gender parity target was set to be achieved a full ten years earlier - an acknowledgement that equal access to education is the foundation for all other development goals. Yet recent statistics show that for every 100 boys out of school, there are still 117 girls in the same situation. Until equal numbers of girls and boys are in school, it will be impossible to build the knowledge necessary to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease and ensure environmental sustainability. And millions of children and women will continue to die needlessly, placing the rest of the development agenda at risk.

**Target** **by** **2015:**  
Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. *As of 2001 estimates around 115 million children of primary school age, the majority of them girls, do not attend school.*

*Source: <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/education.html>*

### **Gender and Decision-Making**

When educational opportunities are not available to women, they also become under-represented in formal decision-making structures. Although, women are increasingly active in community support systems, gender disparities persist in public administration at all levels: local, regional and national. Research has shown that women's participation and representation in decision-making can lower levels of female poverty.

### Box 8: Women in Parliament

Both Houses Combined	
Total MPs	44760
Gender breakdown known for	42701
Men	34608
Women	8093
Percentage of Women	19%

Regional Averages			
	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic Countries	42.1%		
Americas	22.7%	23.7%	22.9%
Europe – OSCE (excluding Nordic)	20.1%	19.7%	20%
Asia	18.6%	16.4%	18.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.3%	20.4%	18.6%
Pacific	13.2%	32.6%	15.3%
Arab States	9.2%	7.6%	8.8%

Source: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

Parliament represents the highest law-making institution, but women who constitute the majority of the population are often marginalized from that decision-making process. Women's representation in parliaments worldwide is usually much lower compared with men. Within parliament, women tend to occupy less powerful positions, a reflection of unequal access to education and social roles assigned to women in general. The socialization process has tended to steer women along the study of subjects related to their expected roles, hence their involvement in parliamentary committees or appointment to ministries often reflects those roles. However, there has been some good news and notable changes in women adopting higher level decision-making positions. Recently Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became the first woman President of an African country (Liberia), Gloria Portia Simpson was elected the first female Prime Minister of Jamaica and Khaleda Zia became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

**Box 9: Some Countries with “Affirmative Action” Policies**

Brazil	Malaysia	Slovakia
Canada	New Zealand	Sweden
United States	Finland	United Kingdom
India	France	Iceland
Sri Lanka	Germany	South Africa
Japan	Norway	Israel
People’s Republic of China	Macedonia	South Korea

*Source: Wikipedia*

Women's share of seats in parliament has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, women still hold only 15.7 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide. Only Rwanda and the Nordic countries have come close to parity. As of 1 January 2005, only 17 countries had met the target of at least 30 percent representation by women in parliament, which was set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990. By the end of 2004, 81 countries had adopted some form of affirmative action, such as party quotas or reserving seats for women in parliament to ensure their political participation.

According to one qualitative study of women in decision making in Southern Africa, women make a marked difference to governance where they are represented in politics in significant numbers and work in enabling environments. The key findings of the study showed that significant presence of women in politics combined with a range of enabling factors including background and history of struggle, democracy, and dynamic links with civil society impacted institutional culture, attitudes, laws, policies, and service delivery.

### **Legal Environment and Access to Justice**

Women, among other poor and marginalized groups, may also encounter problems and discrimination within legal systems. The obstacles faced by woman in the legal environment occur at three levels:

(i) **Laws** - discriminatory laws pertaining to property ownership or the absence of anti-violence legislation

(ii) **Legal systems** - information requirements or evidence procedures that make access to justice inaccessible; and

(iii) **Cultural attitudes** - male bias exhibited by judges, lawyers and court officials.

Legislative reform along with reforms to the legal system can help ensure the protection of women’s rights and equal access to justice. However, additional obstacles remain despite significant progress, thereby limiting the ability of many women to obtain true equality. For instance, poor women lack information, education and access to legal processes, resulting in a gap between equal right conferred on them by legislation and the ability to enforce and enjoy those rights.

Also in some countries, legislative reform and making the legal system more accessible for women may result in women participating in “parallel” legal systems, whereby new sets of legal rights and legal systems coexist alongside pre-existing informal or customary laws and legal systems. The use of customary law is more common in some places and is able to be accessed locally, therefore, it will more likely to be used and applied by marginalized groups, such as women, than formal law. Customary law is particularly significant for women’s access to justice

<b>Box 10: Women to Men Wages</b>		
<b>Examples of women’s wages relative to men’s</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Women’s wages in manufacturing as a % of men’s wage</b>
Botswana	2003	52
Egypt	2002	68
Eritrea	1996	66
Kenya	1997	123
Brazil	2002	61
Colombia	2003	65
Paraguay	2003	53
Mongolia	2003	87
Singapore	2003	61
Sri Lanka	2003	81
Thailand	2003	72

as it tends to govern family or domestic issues such as marriage, divorce, adultery and gender-based violence. Research indicates that when cases are tried through customary law there may be even less chance of women receiving justice than in the case of formal legal systems.

Therefore, legal and legislative reform is vital; however, equal access to justice will not be attained unless the formal legal system becomes accessible at the local level and is favored

over customary mechanisms of justice. Alternatively, efforts need to be made to ensure that customary law develops in a fashion that reinforces equity, so as to compliment legislative reforms in the formal system.

## **Division of Labor**

Typically, women assume most of the responsibility for family wellbeing. Some professional jobs are also considered to be better suited for women, and these jobs are often paid less than jobs typically employed by men. Even when men and women perform the same tasks with the same entry conditions, a woman is often paid at a lower rate than a man. The disparity in pay is based on and justified by an assumption that men are the family breadwinners while women are the family caregivers. Such role-based unequal remuneration disadvantages a woman and an employer, as employees who are not rewarded equally for their toil can be less motivated and be discouraged from performing to their maximum potential, as well as denying a company a woman's potential contribution to the company's success.

## Unit 2 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. What are the negative implications of gender identities and expectations for both men and women?
2. Do you think international commitments like the Millennium Development Goals and others effectively encourage gender equity at the national and community levels? How or how not?
3. Which female legislator in your own country is most effective? Why?
4. Considering your laws, legal systems, and cultural attitude, how have you seen women MPs face difficulties unique from their male counterparts?

## Internet Resources

A Gender Responsive Parliament

<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/8293>

IPU Women in Parliament Statistics: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

UNICEF Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/education.html>

World Bank Ed Stats <http://go.worldbank.org/MFCHOFIR50>