

CHALLENGES TO SOLVE GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE GLOBAL SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF THE UN'S EFFORTS OVER TIME

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by 2030 is the Sustainable Development Goal five that the United Nation established in September 2015. The UN Women states that “women’s leadership and political participation are restricted” (UN Women, 2020). In the economic field, women are paid 24 % less on a global average compared to the wage of men. (United Nations, n.d.). This essay seeks to examine the causes and nature of gender inequality within the contemporary political and economic field at the global level from a Feminist perspective. Furthermore, it will explore intergovernmental organisations’ efforts and challenges to ameliorate this inequality challenge. This desk-based research will source data and literature from extant research. To investigate the above-stated objective, the essay will address these three critical questions: 1. What are the causes and nature of gender inequality in the global system? 2. What are the role and efforts the UN has taken to alleviate political and economic gender inequality? 3. What challenges have these efforts encountered in achieving gender inequality. I define gender inequality as the state where the rights and opportunities that women and men have in the political and economic fields are not equal in this essay. The subsequent section will capture the nature and the cause of gender inequality.

Nature and Causes of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is multifaceted and ubiquitous. It transcends beyond politics to all aspects of human activities. Gender inequality in the economic sphere is noticeable in the global system. For instance, an analysis of the labour market reports the unequal distribution of employed persons and the gender pay gap in the global system by indicating women are more likely to be employed as technical employees, while men hold job opportunities as skilled workers with tools (Mashtalir et al., 2022). Statistically, about 86% of men are employed as skilled workers compared to only 14% of women who work as skilled workers in the labour market (Mashtalir et al., 2022). The percentage of women who are employed in a paid position increased from 40% in the 19th century to 50% in contemporary society at the global level (ibid, 2022). In addition to that problem, another challenge that women workers are likely to face is the gender pay gap, as the UN Women show women earn 24% less than men for the same work. This is attributed to the fewer percentage of women holding higher work positions than men.

The gender inequality in the economic sphere is not revealed only by the statistics, but the labour workforces themselves are feeling the gender gap. One question, “World Values Survey” asked both men and women, if they agree with the statement, “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do”, more respondents from poorer states agreed with the statement (Jayachandran, 2014). This trend can also be seen in a question asking “how much freedom of choice and control over the way your life turns out”. The

answer highlighted that women in developing countries have comparatively less control over their lives than those in developed countries (Jayachandran, 2014). Especially women in developing countries are confronted with relatively greater gender inequality in both economic aspects and their decision-making process. However, the gender gap in the economic sphere can be seen globally, therefore the issue has prevailed in both developed and developing countries.

The gender gap in leadership and political participation in the global system is also evident. For instance, the European Institute for Gender Equality revealed that women hold less domain of power. This is shown by the women's percentage of share of ministers is 34%, women's share of members of parliament is 33%, and women's share of members of regional assemblies is 30% in Europe (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). The percentage indicates that the representation of women in national parliaments, government and local assemblies are not equal and thereby women are not equally represented as men in the sovereign states which are part of the European Union. The gap in women's political participation is not only evident in the European Union but also in a global system. The average percentage of women holding representation in the executive branch of government remains only 16 per cent in the global system in 2010 (Bureau of International Information Programs, 2012). This number is half of the percentage that the UN called a "critical mass" which is 30%, that women should have in the parliamentary seats to bring sufficient representation and changes in national politics.

The causes of gender inequality in the political sphere have long been established in the historical advantage men enjoy in the electoral system. (Bureau of International Information Programs, 2012). Such disadvantages women face are rooted in stereotypes and traditional gender roles in society. Both are often difficult to change immediately as social norms are transformed and acquired subconsciously in the community, and thus everyone in the community believes the standard that men dominate government is the proper shape of the political decision-making process in the state. For instance, many states historically have higher human capital investments in males than females (Jayachandran, 2014). Girls tend to have fewer opportunities to acquire policy and leadership skills at school, the workplace, and even at home. In addition to the women's disadvantage in attaining the same human capital investments, the political arena is often subject to the rule of the "old-boy network" and thus, difficult to exercise gender equality (Bureau of International Information Programs, 2012).

Gender inequality in the economic space has largely been attributed to the existing legal mechanism that does not prohibit the gender pay gap and traditional gender roles that distance women from the same economic opportunities as men (Charles, 2020). For instance, on a global scale, about 54 per cent of the sovereign states do not explicitly prohibit gender discrimination in wages (Gaddis et al., 2020). The non-presence of such law protecting women's rights in equal employment directly disadvantages them in the acquisition of their own property. The burden of completing household chores is also a factor that limits women from accessing the same economic opportunities (Charles, 2020). In the case of the US, social feminists explain that a dual system consisting of capitalism and patriarchy has led women to be economically exploited by society (Cottais, n.d.). In fact, women only earn 70% of men's salary on average in the US (Department of Philosophy, Stanford University, 2004).

Since capitalism produced private and public property, many women were forced to be in the private sphere depriving them of the opportunity to hold public paid work positions as men (ibid, nd). As social feminists' view demonstrates, a particular economic system and the traditional gender role which is a byproduct of the system are the factors that cause gender inequality in the economic sphere. The final paragraphs will then take a critical look into the United Nations' effort into alleviating gender inequality. The United Nations is an international governmental organization established in 1945 consisting of memberships from 193 sovereign states.

The United Nations' Efforts Toward the Alleviation of Gender Inequality

Intergovernmental organisations such as the UN have been taking actions to alleviate gender inequality in the global system to achieve SDG five. For instance, the UN has hosted four world conferences on women, which first took place in 1975 (UN Women, 2020). One of the influential conferences is the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, it set an extensive vision called the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The declaration stated aims and strategic actions to achieve gender equality in different critical areas. Two main strategic objectives were made to reduce gender inequality in the political sphere. The platform for Action called on each sovereign state to implement a measure that ensures women's equal access to and full participation in the power structure and decision-making process. To achieve gender equality, the UN also publish reports which reflect on the implementation of the declaration made in the past to bring changes. For instance, a summary of the Secretary General's report on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the report, it is revealed that women's representation in national parliaments is increasing compared to the percentage of women involved in the parliaments in 1995 (UN WOMEN, 2015). However, the reports also explain that women's involvement in senior decision-making roles in both private and public sectors are remaining low to achieve gender equality in political participation globally. In the end, it provides solutions to further change the situation of gender inequality in the global system. For example, the UN advocates and suggests sovereign states change the system of public financing in political parties to allow each party to advance gender equality.

Furthermore, the aim, situation, and further solutions to empower women in the economic sphere are also stated in the Platform for Action and the Secretary General's report. The report reveals that the gender gap in the labour market of the global system has been narrowed, even though regional variation of women's labour force participation remains (UN Women, 2020). The UN suggests that States should put policies such as minimum wages legislation, and a system for maternity and parental leave as further actions.

The UN's effort to achieve gender equality can be also seen in adopting gender equality as a part of international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the UN's general assembly in December 1948 (United Nations, n.d.). As the implementation of the international human rights law aims at the acceptance of the fundamental norms of human rights that everyone should respect and protect by the global system, incorporating the importance of maintaining gender equality in the law is a significant measure (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.). This is

because gender inequality in both the economic and political spheres is deeply rooted in stereotypical views toward women, traditional gender roles, and social norms that people share. Including the protection of gender equality in such law will enhance people to recognise the importance of equal treatment of men and women in the global system which will gradually change their traditional views and social norms toward women.

To sum up, the UN makes a wealth of decisions to influence State actions in tackling gender inequality as a serious global issue and reflect on global achievements by providing statistical data to educate the present conditions and further actions that each state should take. In addition, they also incorporate new laws in the international human rights law to alter the social norms that the global system shares but what is making women from holding equal rights and opportunities in both economic and political spheres. The subsequent sections will capture the challenges that the UN and sovereign states are confronted with to achieve gender equality.

Challenges to solving gender inequality

One of the challenges that each nation-state and intergovernmental organisation are facing to achieve SDG five is the women's low representation in national parliaments which does not satisfy the "critical mass" to change the traditional men dominating government. Since women are given fewer opportunities, investments, and education, they experience fewer opportunities to acquire and improve leadership skills at home and in school making it difficult for them to become representatives in the political arena (Bureau of International Information Programs, 2012). Gender inequality in political spheres is intertwined with gender inequality in their education. Therefore, the challenges of solving gender inequality start with solving gender inequality in girls' education. However, attempting to solve the inequality in education becomes problematic due to the low number of women represented to solve the inequality in education to implement effective measures. Namely, the UN and sovereign states are required to attempt to eliminate gender inequality in particular aspects by tackling gender inequality in all aspects including the inequality in education, politics, etcetera, which makes it challenging for them to take the first action.

The UN' Platform for Action suggests each state government commit itself to protect and promote the equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities. However, some states have failed to effect such action. For instance, in Nigeria, the Gender and Equal Opportunity bill was rejected in 2016(Eniola, 2018) because only seven members of 109 senators were women. Yet, the bill has still not passed in 2022 after three times of the consideration and passage were frustrated (Iroanusi, 2022). This challenge corroborates the argument of the Social Dominance Theory which states that "a combination of political conservatism, prejudice, a belief in meritocracy, and the assumption of the inferiority of marginalized groups leads to the formations of persistent ideological myths" (Islam, 2014:1779). It further explains that, these "legitimising myths" (Pratto, 1999) become codified and institutionalised and serve to convince people that existing structures of

inequality are just and desirable. As such, institutions become reluctant to implement policies which are meant to advantage the marginalised individuals which in this case are women (Islam, 2014). The UN with the view of Liberalism, society is capable of cooperating to maintain peace and secure the dignity of individuals, it needs to by some means, change the realists' view gender inequality would not be solved as long as particular groups continue to pursue their own interests to achieve women's equal representation in the political sphere. Both are the UN's challenges to suspend the dominant groups from pursuing their own desire of dominating marginalised subdominant groups which are women in the political sphere and to change the people's convinced belief about women being subdominant groups in politics. Overcoming these two challenges will allow girls to gain the same level of education and investment as boys, which will eventually allow more women to be represented in the political sphere.

This case illustrates the challenge the UN is confronted with that their efforts to achieve gender equality are sometimes ineffective because states fail to affect them, particularly because those who are supposed to effect such a crucial decision are dominated by men. In essence, patriarchy which has permeated states' decision-making organs is frustrating efforts made by the UN to alleviate gender inequality. As the UN cannot make decisions for a sovereign state's administrative entities, the challenge to solve gender inequality remains unless each state reflects on the suggestions made by the UN.

Efforts toward gender equality in the economic sphere have to some extent, failed to mark significant milestones. Among the numerous reasons for this is the inherent cultural and social roots of the inequality challenge. It has long been established that gender inequality is deeply ingrained in the culture and norms of societies which serve as the roots of people's beliefs and identities. Hence challenging gender inequality principally translates into changing people's long-held beliefs and norms which is to a large extent impossible to achieve. Society has historically been structured to exclude women from the economic spheres of life. This has since influenced society's unacceptance of women as crucial economic contributors. It becomes impossible to change culture, social norms and identity overnight.

Liberal Feminists argue that men and women are equal meaning they should both have equal access to economic opportunities (Nsengimana & Naicker, 2021). However, in reality, women face discriminatory access to these opportunities. The UN's Platform for Actions states that women's economic development challenges (poverty) are directly related to the lack of access to education, access to economic resources, and their minimal participation in the decision-making process (UN Women, 1995). Liberal Feminists have attributed this existing discriminatory gap against women to patriarchy. In fact, this remains a challenge in our world today. The platform for action recommended states revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources in 1995. As of 2020, some states had still not considered this recommendation by the UN. For instance, about 23 per cent of sovereign states still implement statutory inheritance law that limits women's inheritance rights as children and spouses contributing to the gender gap in ownership (Gaddis et al., 2020). The underlying patriarchy is supported by such laws in some states, as opposed to the UN's suggestions to achieve gender equality in the economic sphere. The challenges to solving the gender gap in economic opportunities are the patriarchy,

the economic structure status quo which excludes women from active economic activities and the UN' limited ability to make decisions for sovereign states that still implement laws supporting the patriarchy.

Gender inequality is a complex chain of discrimination in all aspects of societal activities. It is a multifaceted challenge making it difficult to solve by simply implementing a new policy. Especially, in the case of women's low representation in the political sphere rooted in the girls' disadvantage of receiving the same education as men, both inequality needs to be solved to alleviate one another. However, solving one of the two is challenging because both inequalities are deeply interconnected and the traditional state governmental system is less amenable to bringing a change. Furthermore, altering people's beliefs, social norms, and stereotypical views toward women is also difficult because they are transformed and acquired by individuals subconsciously. The challenges of solving multiple interconnected gender inequality, suspending the dominant groups' exploitation of women, and changing people's subconscious thoughts are the major challenges that hinder the global system from achieving gender equality.

Conclusion

The cause of gender inequality prevailing in the global system is not attributed to one factor. In fact, multiple different factors are intertwined and disadvantage women from having the same economic opportunities and representation in the political arena. The UN has been making a significant influence to achieve SDG 5 by publishing the Platform for Actions and incorporating gender equality into international human rights law. However, since the cause of the inequality is multifaceted and the inequality in different aspects is related to the other gender gap, UN and sovereign states are still confronted with many challenges to achieving gender equality in both political and economic space in the global system.

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