COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Directed By: Jeanie Morrison

TSMUN XXIV BACKGROUND GUIDE 2020

**Topic I:** Empowering Women and Girls in Rural Contexts

**Topic II:** Encouraging the Participation of Women in Government and Decision-Making Roles

Dear Delegates,

My name is Jeanie Morrison and I am so happy to have you as part of Tallahassee Southern Model United Nations! I’m the director of The Commission on the Status of Women at TSMUN 2020. I am currently a sophomore at Tallahassee Community College, studying International Relations. This is my second year on the TCC Model UN team and my second year participating in TSMUN.

The topics we will be discussing for this year’s Commission on the Status of Women will be:

1. I. Empowering Women and Girls in Rural Contexts
2. II. Encouraging the Participation of Women in Government and Decision-Making Roles

The Commission on the Status of Women is one of nine functional commissions of The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Commission on the Status of Women is solely dedicated to ensuring and monitoring the advancement of women and gender equality worldwide, and is the foremost policy-making body in these areas. Each year, Member States as well as representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) gather to discuss and monitor progress being made for gender equality, identify roadblocks in achieving equality goals, set global standards in equality, and create policies which further women’s issues worldwide.

I hope that this background guide helps you prepare for the conference. This background guide is intended to give an overview of the topics that we will discuss in committee and give delegates a starting point for their research. Delegates are asked to research the positions and viewpoints of their countries on the topics at hand and look into pertinent regional and international initiatives as well as past actions taken by the committee in relation to the topics presented.

Each delegation is expected to submit a position paper before the start of the first committee session. Position papers should be emailed to positionpapers@tsun.org, or turned in via hard copy or USB drive. You can also email me with any questions you may have before the conference at csw@tsmun.org. Additionally, you can contact the Secretary-General of the conference, Mónica García Vega at sg@tsmun.org with any questions you may have. You can find guides and examples to help you with your position papers at <http://www.tsmun.org/position-papers.html> and can find helpful information on the conference, how to prepare, and available scholarships at <http://www.tsmun.org/>. Please be aware that position papers that are not in the proper format will not be eligible for position paper awards regardless of content. I am excited to work with you all in committee!

Sincerely,

Jeanie Morrison

Director of the Commission on the Status of Women

csw@tsmun.org

**Committee Overview**

***Introduction***

The Commission on The Status of Women (CSW) was established as a functioning commission of The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of the six main bodies of the United Nations (UN), by Council Resolution 11 on June 21, 1946.[[1]](#footnote-1) ECOSOC is responsible for debating economic, social, and environmental world issues and producing solutions on ways to combat these issues to reach international goals. The Commission on the Status of Women takes on the tasks of ECOSOC with a focus on women’s rights and gender equality. The CSW meets annually for a two-week session at UN headquarters in New York City.[[2]](#footnote-2) The CSW has produced several resolutions and declarations such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), which aims to eliminate violence and discrimination toward women and to encourage the active participation of women in all areas of life through gender equality in “economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making.” [[3]](#footnote-3) The CSW created the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to conduct research on gender inequality, educate UN bodies on data collected, create programs which promote women’s rights, and fund these programs internationally. [[4]](#footnote-4)

***Committee Mandate***

The main function of The Commission on the Status of Women, as outlined in ECOSOC Council Resolution 11(II) of June 21, 1946, is to create reports with recommendations on “promoting women’s rights in political, economic, social, and educational fields” [[5]](#footnote-5) which they then send to ECOSOC for approval, after which they are sent as policy recommendations to Member States as well as other UN bodies. In 1996, ECOSOC expanded the Commission on the Status of Women’s mandate to include monitoring the process of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and reporting on the progress and obstacles of this process.[[6]](#footnote-6) Additionally, the Commission was from that point on tasked with mainstreaming a gender viewpoint in all UN actions. As promoting gender equality in political contexts is one of the core goals of the CSW, they are tasked with ensuring that women’s perspectives are included in all UN policy and decision-making processes. In the first-ever committee session of the CSW, the main goal of the commission was declared as “to raise the status of women, irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women in the provisions of statutory law, in legal maxims or rules, or in interpretation of customary law.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Through INSTRAW and UNIFEM, the CSW can create and

fund programs which promote these goals and can implement the suggestions generated by the Commission in the real world.[[8]](#footnote-8)

***Governance, Structure, and Membership***

The Commission on the Status of Women is comprised of one representative from each of 45 Member States selected by ECOSOC based on geographic distribution.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Secretary-General of the Commission consults with the governments chosen for representation after which these governments nominate representatives who are then either confirmed or denied by the council. Representatives serve on the Commission for four-year terms and are eligible for re-election upon the conclusion of these terms.[[10]](#footnote-10) Should a representative be unable to complete their term, the Member State will propose a representative to fill their place who will be subject to the approval of the council. The Bureau of the CSW prepares for which topics will be discussed at each annual session, and the order of the topics discussed is voted on by the delegates once in session. CSW Bureau members serve for two years.[[11]](#footnote-11) The CSW is one of the only UN bodies which allows NGOs to participate in its proceedings which means that non-Member States can take part in the commission in some capacity.[[12]](#footnote-12) The inclusion of NGOs in its deliberations gives the CSW a unique opportunity to promote its recommendations not only to nations which are not UN Member States, but also directly to NGOs which can help build and participate in gender equality programs with INSTRAW.[[13]](#footnote-13)

***Conclusion***

The Commission on The Status of Women is a functional commission of The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) whose primary objective is to monitor the progress of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and create solutions to combat gender discrimination and propose ideas for achieving the gender- focused sustainable development goals.[[14]](#footnote-14) The CSW uses its agencies INSTRAW and UNIFEM to research areas of gender discrimination and create programs and recommendations to combat this discrimination.[[15]](#footnote-15) Through its work with ECOSOC and NGOs, the CSW is able to promote its values and suggestions for gender equality policies to UN Member States and non-Member States alike.

**Empowering Women and Girls in Rural Contexts**

***Introduction***

Gender inequality affects Member States’ ability to meet almost every Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), particularly in rural areas. For example, people in rural areas are more likely to experience hunger, and women and girls make up roughly 60 percent of people who experience consistent hunger.[[16]](#footnote-16) In addition, over 60 percent of the 796 million illiterate people in the world are women, and the majority of these women are in rural areas.[[17]](#footnote-17) This is likely due, in part, to the fact that according to data collected from 42 countries, girls in rural areas are less than half as likely to go to school as girls in urban areas.[[18]](#footnote-18) The lack of access to schools in rural areas leads to a decrease in girls’ enrollment. In fact, in Pakistan alone, the very proximity of a school can affect the enrollment of girls by up to 20 percent.[[19]](#footnote-19) Rural women are far less likely to be educated than their urban counterparts and even rural boys, and their lack of education can have long term negative impacts on the wellbeing of their children.

Reports from sixty-eight different countries show that the level of education a mother has directly affects her child’s chance of survival.[[20]](#footnote-20) Due in part to lower levels of education, women in rural areas are more likely to hold low wage jobs than men, and also earn lower wages than men for the same work despite the fact that they often work more hours a week than men.[[21]](#footnote-21) Rural women are also usually the ones who make the long treks to retrieve drinkable water and collect fuel for their families which greatly decreases the time women have to be able to work or attend school.[[22]](#footnote-22)

***The Current Situation***

An average of over 42 percent of the agricultural workforce in rural countries is made up of women.[[23]](#footnote-23) More than 60 percent of women with jobs in sub- Saharan Africa and nearly 70 percent of working women in South Asia have jobs in agriculture.[[24]](#footnote-24) It is estimated that if women working in agriculture had access to the same resources as their male counterparts, their farms could produce 20 to 30 percent more crops, which would mean an increase in the overall food production in these countries leading to a 12 to 17 percent decrease in the total number of hungry people in the world.[[25]](#footnote-25)

For many people, employment is the entry point for economic well-being, yet globally women still work at lower rates than men. [[26]](#footnote-26) Gender stereotypes often police what is defined as “women’s work” and often forces women into some of the worst jobs. Of 143 countries, at least 90 percent have legal restrictions on women’s employment.[[27]](#footnote-27) While 75 percent of the world’s working-age men are in the labor force, only 50 percent of working-age women are in the labor force and globally women earn 24 percent less than men. [[28]](#footnote-28)For an inclusive economy to exist, a livable and equal wage must be of utmost importance, along with protection against gender discrimination.

Not even 20 percent of the landowners in the world are women, and in rural areas such as North Africa and West Asia, women make up less than 5 percent of landowners.[[29]](#footnote-29) Additionally, women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend roughly 40 billion hours gathering drinkable water per year. For example, in Guinea, women spend 5.7 hours per week collecting water compared to men who spend 2.3 hours per week collecting water. Women in Sierra Leone spend 7.3 hours a week collecting water as opposed to men who spend 4.5 hours a week collecting water. In Malawi, this number jumps to 9.1 hours a week collecting water for women and 1.1 hours a week collecting water for men.[[30]](#footnote-30) Both women’s lack of access and ability to own land and their increased responsibility to gather resources for their families leads to decreased income for women, which studies show leads to a decline in the health, education, and nutrition of children.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Worldwide, only 39 percent of girls in rural areas receive a secondary school education as opposed to 45 percent of boys in rural areas, 59 percent of girls in urban areas, and 60 percent of boys in urban areas.[[32]](#footnote-32) Each additional year of education can increase girls’ lifetime wages by 10 to 20 percent and can encourage them to postpone marriage and give birth to fewer children as well as make them less susceptible to violence.[[33]](#footnote-33) Financially independent women who have fewer children are less likely to experience poverty and less likely to have anyone in their family experience chronic hunger.[[34]](#footnote-34) Furthermore, in Latin America and the Caribbean for example, children with mothers who have no education are 1.6 times more likely to die than those who have mothers with a primary school education, and 3.1 times more likely to die than those whose mothers have a secondary school or higher education.[[35]](#footnote-35) Additionally, only roughly one-third of women in rural areas sought prenatal care as opposed to 50 percent of women in more developed areas.[[36]](#footnote-36)

***Actions Taken by the UN***

UN Women, a UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, has supported the National Girls Education Network in implementing the National Girls Education Strategy in Malawi, along with helping develop an advocacy plan that focuses on ending child marriage and early pregnancies[[37]](#footnote-37). This is to contribute to access, retention and completion of schooling by girls in Malawi. A National Girls Education Conference was held in 2015, with advocacy activities including organization of a film premier, and touched issues of inequality between girls and boys, especially in education.[[38]](#footnote-38) In general, the activities focused on empowering youth to enable their voices to be heard, which promoted a participatory approach to find solutions and to address the root causes of violence while addressing inequalities that are evident in the Malawian education system.[[39]](#footnote-39)

UN Women’s Uganda country office systematically engaged in the media in raising awareness of policymakers on women’s health and energy service provision in health institutions, in partnership with the UN Foundation, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).[[40]](#footnote-40) The project focused on bringing light to the challenges that women face in accessing health services. A multi-stakeholder consultation workshop was held to help in creating thematic networks for collaboration, partnerships and advocacy for action. UN Women organized consultations were meant to mobilize and advocate gender, health and energy stakeholders in the public and private sectors, the UN system and other partners to ensure electricity provisions to health facilities through sustainable energy. [[41]](#footnote-41)The consultations were also used to identify funding opportunities that could support reliable energy provisions for health facilities that integrate gender dimensions.[[42]](#footnote-42) UN Women’s Tanzania and South Sudan country offices have also been involved in interventions around solar energy targeting women and contributing to the implementations of SDG 7.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The UN has been addressing the global crisis caused by unsafe water and sanitation for a long time. In 2016, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution International Decade (2018-2028) for Action- Water for Sustainable Development to help put a greater emphasis on water during the ten years.[[44]](#footnote-44) The new Decade will focus on the “sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives”, as well as on further cooperation and partnership at all levels.[[45]](#footnote-45) The Water Action Decade will advance efforts towards meeting water-correlated challenges, including

limited access to safe water, sanitation, increasing pressure on water resources and ecosystems, and heightened risks of droughts and floods.[[46]](#footnote-46)

***Regional and International Frameworks***

In 1967, United Nations Member States adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which states that “discrimination against women is an offense against human dignity and calls on Member States to abolish existing laws, regulations and practices that discriminate women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women”[[47]](#footnote-47). In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In its preamble it explains that, despite the existence of other instruments, women still do not have equal rights with men.[[48]](#footnote-48) CEDAW called upon Member States to dismantle operational barriers that frequently disregarded and discriminated against rural women from the full obtainment of their human rights.[[49]](#footnote-49) Articles 11 and 12 of CEDAW establishes the right for all women to work and receive equal compensation and benefits for their labor, while noting the importance of eliminating barriers to accessing health care services.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The 1992 *Geneva Declaration on Rural Women* also discusses the importance of creating opportunities for women to promote their own political, social and economic empowerment, as well as improving women’s access to resources.[[51]](#footnote-51) The key focuses of the declaration include the improvement of rural women’s access to financial services, the development of infrastructure and the review of existing land legislation.[[52]](#footnote-52) The General Assembly 1996 resolution 50/165, emphasizes these actions by encouraging Member States to implement issues of importance to rural women in national policy development.[[53]](#footnote-53) The resolution also encourages Member States to increase the participation of rural women in decision-making processes.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Women’s empowerment in the discussions on sustainable development was brought to light during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).[[55]](#footnote-55) In *The Future We Want*, the outcome document of the conference, Member States reestablished their commitments to empower

women as a way to achieve the SDGs. [[56]](#footnote-56) The document highlighted the need for Member States to implement measures that were included in CEDAW.[[57]](#footnote-57) Also mentioned, was the importance of

working towards women’s political and economic empowerment by eliminating barriers that prevent full participation of women.[[58]](#footnote-58)

***Conclusion***

Even with the many frameworks and policies created throughout the international community, rural women are faced with unique life-threatening challenges, are held back by lower education levels, face discrimination, and are burdened by unpaid work and unequal opportunities in the workplace. The disregard for women’s role in achieving the SDGs causes the progress of the 2030 Agenda to slow down heavily. Women and girls play a huge role in the achievement of the SDGs, and while the international community has been working hard to include and empower them, it is still not enough. Issues related to sustainable development and women still need to be further discussed among the international community. Given the background in working with and advancing the interests of rural women, the CSW is specifically placed to continue bringing these issues to light. What actions could be taken by the CSW to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment in context to the SDGs? What are challenges that developed and developing Member States face in the process of women’s empowerment and how can they be resolved through sustainable development? How can the international community utilize existing organizations and entities to further include women and girls in the achievement of the SDGs? How can global disasters, such as climate change, be resolved in the context of women empowerment as a part of sustainable development?

**Encouraging the Participation of Women in Government and Decision-making Roles**

 ***Introduction***

Gender biased laws and customs, as well as the limited job and educational opportunities for women can hold them back from being able to participate in decision-making on the same scale as men.[[59]](#footnote-59) Due to continued discrimination, biases in the workplace, harassment, and gender-based violence, the progress of increasing women in government has slowed significantly.[[60]](#footnote-60) In fact, in the world today, only about 21 percent of parliamentarians are women. While this number is up roughly 10 percent from the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, suggesting that progress is being made, at this rate of change, the participation of women in these roles will not be equal to men until next century at the earliest.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Women in power and decision-making is one of the 12 main areas of concern as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action which includes two commitments for change; promoting “measures ensuring women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making” and encouraging “steps to increase women’s ability to participate”.[[62]](#footnote-62) An example of measures that can be taken to ensure that women have equal access to decision-making are political quotas which have led to large increases in the number of women leaders in several countries.[[63]](#footnote-63) Some steps that can be taken to make women more able to participate in decision-making are providing training for women on leadership skills, political campaigning tactics, and public speaking techniques.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Women sharing equal participation in leadership roles can improve societies. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women politicians tend to focus more on legislation involving legal protections and social welfare programs, and women politicians also improve the trust of citizens.[[65]](#footnote-65) Evidence collected from a study of 25 different developed and developing countries shows that those countries with more female parliamentary representation are more likely to designate protected land.[[66]](#footnote-66) Promoting leadership by women through the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action will hopefully bring the world closer to the equal participation of women.[[67]](#footnote-67)

***The Current Situation***

There is a significant gender gap worldwide in regards to women’s access to and participation in decision-making and leadership roles.[[68]](#footnote-68) In fact, women represent fewer elected representatives in most rural councils and more urban bodies alike.[[69]](#footnote-69) While the involvement of women in government affairs has steadily increased over the past 20 years, the amount of women included is still critically behind in achieving the goals that have been set by the international community.[[70]](#footnote-70) For example, in Sri Lanka, only 1.6 percent of elected officials are women, and in Pakistan, only 31 percent of elected officials are women.[[71]](#footnote-71) The percentage of women as heads of councils is even smaller. In Bangladesh, less than 1 percent of council chairs are women, and in Cambodia, only 7 percent of council chairs are women.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Educated women are more likely to have more decision-making power in their own homes, in their places of work, and in society so the education of women and girls is of the utmost importance.[[73]](#footnote-73)In many places around the world, educating girls is perceived as less important than the education of boys, and in rural areas there is even greater problems such as, social and cultural barriers, greater distances to travel to school, and the many labor requirements that keep many girls out of school.[[74]](#footnote-74)

***International and Regional Frameworks***

Internationally, the rights of women in political environment have been highlighted and promoted in many conventions, declarations, and resolutions.[[75]](#footnote-75) The *International Bill of Human Rights* serves as the foundation of the UN system’s human rights framework. The bill includes the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1996) and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948).[[76]](#footnote-76) The frameworks protect the rights of women and girls and also ensures equal participation for all peoples in political and civil matters.[[77]](#footnote-77) Soon after these were established, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women*, in which established women’s basic rights to run for public office and to hold public office positions.[[78]](#footnote-78)

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) highlights the importance of involving and empowering women and girls.[[79]](#footnote-79) While SDG 4 is centered on access to education and training for all[[80]](#footnote-80), SDG 5 is completely dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.[[81]](#footnote-81) Along with those, SDG 10 is focusing on reducing inequality in all aspects.[[82]](#footnote-82) SDG 16 highlights the importance of ensuring that governmental bodies can effectively implement the SDGs through institutions that are inclusive.[[83]](#footnote-83) The 2030 Agenda helps guide Member States in the process of achieving the SDGs that are set in place.

Regionally, Member States have worked closely together to create many frameworks in order to advocate for the involvement of women in government. In 1948, the *Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women* was created. The document was one of the first international documents that was explicitly dedicated to the involvement of women in government.[[84]](#footnote-84) Along with that, The European Commission has many frameworks regarding women being involved in governance. The most recent of them is the *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* and it centers around involving women in governance and decision-making, as well as in the economy.[[85]](#footnote-85)

***Conclusion***

Unless women are fairly represented and able to participate actively in legislative bodies in all societies, their priorities and rights will not be fulfilled. Inclusive participation of women in legislative and governmental bodies advances development and prioritizes diversity. While the international community has worked diligently and carefully to reach the goal of gender equality in governmental forums, there are still many places it falls short. Gender discrimination, lack of access and difficulties to obtain quality education all contribute to the ineffective and low amounts of women in decision-making roles. CSW and the rest of the international community must continue to work hard towards the equal participation of women in government and decision-making roles in order to achieve the international community’s objectives. How can CSW and other international entities work with Member States to include women fairly in local, national and international governance bodies? What national and regional actions have been successful in the implementation of women in decision-making roles, and how can they be enforced at an international level? What can be done to ensure that Member States are continuously working towards implementing the fair participation of women in government?

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