



Stanford Model United Nations Conference 2014

UN Economic and Social Council



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Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2014 Stanford Model United Nations Conference (SMUNC) and to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). My name is Wendy Li and I will be your 2014 ECOSOC head chair. I am a sophomore majoring in Electrical Engineering and minoring in Computer Science. Mattias Johansson will also be chairing ECOSOC with me. Mattias is a junior majoring in Economics and International Relations. We are both very excited to chair the ECOSOC committee.

2014 is an exciting year for ECOSOC. As the target date of the Millennium Development Goals fast approaches, we must reflect on past achievement and failures as well as pursue future progress. Therefore the topics we will be discussing this year are women's economic empowerment and the future of disaster risk reduction. Both topics have a significant impact on the economic and social aspects

I look forward to meeting all of you at the conference and hope that these issues will inspire debate and cooperation. Please do not hesitate to email Mattias or me if you have any questions.

Regards,

Wendy Li

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Introduction of the Committee

The United Nations Economic and Social Council is one of the six main organs of the United Nations established by the UN Charter in 1946. Chapter X of the Charter of the United Nations established ECOSOC as a founding body and principal organ alongside the General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat and the Trusteeship Council. As membership increased through the years, two amendments to the Charter have been made to reflect this growth. In 1965 and 1973 Article 61 of the Charter was amended to increase membership in ECOSOC from 18 to 27 members, and then 27 to 54 members. Today, ECOSOC is responsible for coordinating 14 UN specialized agencies, their functional commissions and five regional commissions.

In achieving its role as a moderator for discussing crosscutting issues among several committees, ECOSOC has the power to call for international conferences, submit draft conventions to the General Assembly, and make recommendations to other committees and countries. According to Article 62 of the UN Charter, ECOSOC, “may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters” to UN bodies.

ECOSOC primarily serves as a forum for discussion on economic, social, cultural, educational, and health related topics while assisting UN entities in shaping their related programs. ECOSOC not only serves to provide a framework on which the Security Council and General Assembly can establish resolutions upon, these UN bodies may also request that ECOSOC carry out functions on their behalf. Finally, ECOSOC may also perform the function of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)

The AMR is a review and voluntary presentation by member states to assess UN progress towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The DCF facilitates consultation processes by providing policy reviews and recommendations.

Topic A: Women's Economic Empowerment in Developing Nations

1. Statement of the Problem

Women's economic empowerment or the capacity for women to bring about economic change for themselves is one of the most important factors towards achieving gender equality.⁵ Recognizing women's economic empowerment is necessary for sustainable development and achievement of all Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Without women's economic empowerment, gender inequality leads to a vicious cycle of poverty for many developing nations. Women have no access to equal opportunities at education, employment and salary. This leads to economic disparities between genders and can in turn lead to women resorting to more drastic measures for money such as prostitution and low wage labor. As a result while women are 50% of the world's population, they make up 70% of the world's poor.³ Improving employment opportunities and rights for women has the potential to benefit development. For example total agricultural outputs in Africa would increase by up to 20% if women had equal access to agricultural inputs as men.³ It is therefore crucial to economic and social development that women have greater access to educational and economic opportunities.

2. History/ Past UN Actions

The United Nations commitment to the advancement of women began in 1945 after the signing of the UN Charter. The UN Charter reaffirmed "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."² It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the UN began to focus on the concerns of women in developing nations. During the 1960s greater awareness of discrimination against women in developing nations rose and many committees were raised to combat it.

In the 1960s evidence accumulated that women were disproportionately affected by poverty. Furthermore, groups like Commission on the Status of Women brought greater attention to

the issues of women's economic participation in development.¹ Soon afterwards the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1963.³

In 1970, research on African farmers concluded that development was gender blind and could harm women as a result. From this research, the Women in Development (WID) approach emerged that recognized the lack of opportunities for women to be involved in education and employment. The WID focused on legislatively limiting discrimination and promoting more female involvement in education and employment. While the WID attempted to create more gender equality through its efforts, it failed to address underlying social inequalities based on unequal gender roles and relations.¹

Based on critiques of WID, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach was developed in the 1980s. The GAD suggested a focus on both women and men to reduce gender inequality. Instead of focusing on women in the process of development alone, there needs to be analysis into the reasons for why women are excluded and solutions should be offered based on these observations.¹ Later in the 1990s, NGOs and agencies adopted a rights-based approach to development and established sexual and reproductive rights for all women.¹

3. Latest Developments

Gender inequality continues to present a major issue in economic and social development today. On September 20th, 2014 the UN Women global gender solidarity program began. The HeForShe campaign plans to mobilize one billion men and boys to advocate change for gender equality. The HeForShe campaign brings to light the cost of inaction. UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson highlighted that, "The reality is, that if we do nothing, it will take 75 years before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work...and at the current rate, it will 2086 before all rural African girls can have a secondary education."⁴

Funding and continued interest in women's economic empowerment continues today and show significant progress. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a seed fund from the

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has helped women gain respect in their community as economic partners. In Bangladesh, a UNFPA fund has supported micro-credit projects that provide skills training and small business loans to women as well as supports reproductive health and family planning services.⁵

4. Problems a Resolution should Address/ Possible Solutions

There are many constraints in fully achieving women's economic empowerment. Some issues that one should keep in mind when suggesting solutions are family structure, legal discrimination and cultural practices. Women are often discriminated against in family households through unequal allocations of household resources. Families are less willing to invest into the education of girls and rather focus on their potential as wives and mothers. This contributes to early and forced marriages that impair a woman's chances of engaging in education and economic opportunities.¹ Furthermore women are often discriminated in the justice system. Legally women are often discriminated in issues of family, property, citizenship and employment. Finally in many cultures, religious and gender relations treat women as subordinate to men. This general pattern gives women less autonomy, fewer resources and limited influence over decision-making processes in society.

Some questions to consider:

1. Investments in education often focus on ensuring girls have access to primary education. However inequality of access continues to be a major issue in secondary and higher education as well as areas of study like science and technology. How can ECOSOC best allocate limited UN resources towards improving women's access to education? Should it focus on improving primary education over higher education?
2. Sexual and reproductive health rights are critical for social and economic development. Without these rights, women cannot make decisions about fertility and it directly reduces economic productivity. How can ECOSOC address the importance of sexual and reproductive health rights?
3. While micro financing is often suggested as a solution to empowering women, without proper infrastructure and supplementary services, its effect is limited. In order for small incomes generated through micro-financing to grow into business, women need access to credit, banking and financial services. What are some ways of improving the

infrastructure around micro-financing in order for women run businesses to grow?

5. Works Cited

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4. *Star-studded event kicks off UN Women global gender solidarity campaign*. N.p.: UN News Centre, 20 Sept. 2014. Print.
5. *Women's Work and Economic Empowerment*. UNFPA, n.d. Web. 19 Sept. 2014.

Topic B: The Future of Disaster Risk Reduction

1. Statement of the Problem

Since 1980, natural disasters have cost the world an estimated \$3.8 trillion USD.⁵ Due to a rising number of disasters and growing economic development, the cost of natural disasters will only continue to increase. It is crucial that measures to reduce disaster risk and prepare for natural disasters be implemented. Disaster risk reduction as defined by the United Nations Development Program is "the conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid or to limit the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development."² Disaster preparedness measures include: early monitoring, preemptive evacuations and pre-positioning of essential stocks and

response personnel.²

Throughout the decades, disaster risk reduction has evolved to become a global network of support. However in March 2015, the current international framework for disaster risk reduction, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) will end and be replaced.³ It is the responsibility of ECOSOC to suggest methods of improving disaster risk reduction plans once the HFA has expired.

2. History / Past UN Actions

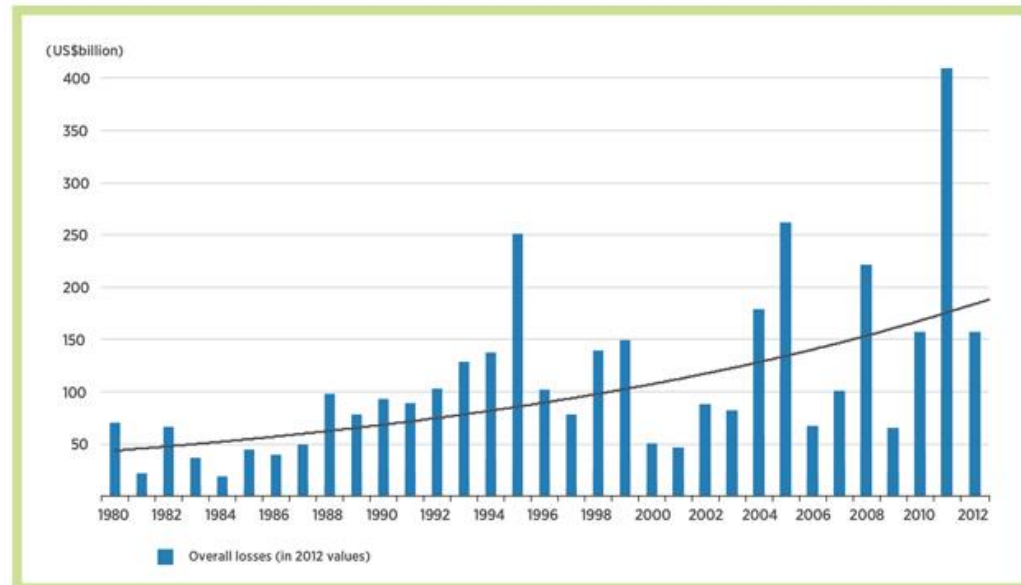
Natural disaster relief and disaster management has continued to be a topic of grave importance for the international community. For the past decades the UN General Assembly (GA) with the support of ECOSOC has worked to reduce losses from natural disaster by creating a global culture of prevention and cooperation.

In 1962, the Buyin-Zara earthquake struck Iran and killed more than 12,000 people. Several years later, a severe earthquake struck again in Iran killing more than 10,000 people.⁴ In response to the increasing need for disaster awareness and recognizing the negative impact it has on human development, the United Nations began adopting measures of disaster risk reduction. Starting in the 1960s, the GA began requesting funds for assisting countries in reconstructing affected areas after major disasters. Recognizing a need to promote disaster prevention and assist in disaster relief the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) was created in 1971.⁴ Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the UN continued to strengthen the capacity of the UNDRO and stress “the need to take full advantage of information provided by existing early-warning monitoring systems.”⁴

In the 1990s, the GA designated the 1990s as a decade for fostering international cooperation in the field of natural disaster reduction. During this decade, the GA held the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Yokohama Japan.³ The decade of disaster awareness increased the recognition of natural disasters as a major threat to social and economic stability. Addressing increasing awareness of the consequences of natural disasters, the GA developed the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.⁴

In these past decades, data collected by the World Bank shows an increase in natural disaster costs since 1980. The annual cost of global disaster losses has risen from \$50 billion a year in the 1980s to \$200 billion a year today.⁵ However the cost of disasters has been significantly reduced due to disaster risk reduction plans.⁵

Figure A: Global disaster losses from 1980–2012



Graph of disaster costs from 1980-2012 (World Bank)

In fact, the World Bank found that flood damage alone would cost upwards of \$1 trillion every year by 2050 without investments into protective infrastructure.⁵

3. Latest Developments

Addressing the GA's continued focus on international strategies for disaster reduction, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was established in 2005.³ Adopted by 168 countries, the HFA pledges to reduce the impact of disasters. It is a 10-year plan that works together with governments, international agencies, disaster experts and many others to build a strong infrastructure of support to reduce disaster risk.³ The HFA outlines five priorities for action: Ensuring that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority, identifying, assessing and monitoring disaster risks for early warning, using knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience, reducing underlying risk factors and strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.³ Implementation of the HFA has been largely beneficial. Since 2007 to 2011, country participation has increased from 27 governments to more than 100 reports.⁸ Countries have enacted national legislation on disaster risk management modeled on HFA principles. While there has been increasing development of policy and

legislation for disaster risk reduction, there has been less improvement in “the decentralization of responsibilities and financial resource for disaster risk reduction.”⁸

Complementing the HFA, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established as an outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. The SDGs aim to build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) past the 2015 development agenda. Goal 11 of the SDG aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”⁴. In doing so, the SDG plans to implement policies for resilience to disasters and disaster risk management at all levels.⁴

Discussion concerning disaster relief has continued and in April 2014, ECOSOC addressed its concern at the increasing number of people affected by humanitarian emergencies, highlighting those associated with natural hazards.² The committee pressed the United Nations to strengthen humanitarian capacities by transferring technology and expertise to developing nations while urging member states to develop disaster preparedness and risk reduction measures.²

Furthermore in July 2014, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) organized the first preparation meeting for the successor of the HFA dubbed HFA2.⁶ At this meeting, many partners called for closer integration between HFA2, the SDGs and the 2015 climate agreement. Other concerns included the need for a framework that is practical and action-oriented with an emphasis on building financing for risk reduction.⁶

4. Problems a Resolution should Address/ Possible Solutions

The aim of disaster risk reduction is to significantly reduce disaster losses, in lives and in social, economic and environmental assets of a community and country. Accordingly discussion and resolution writing should look towards past success and failures to identify key areas of focus to improve disaster relief and risk reduction.

Some questions to consider when proposing your solutions are:

1. What areas of DRR should countries prioritize considering the limited resources and funding available?
2. No single organization is capable of addressing every area of DRR, consequently

partnerships are essential to the improvement of DRR. How should cooperation be fostered among countries and organizations?

3. Looking back at the HFA, what are some weaknesses of the framework that can be improved in the future?
4. While legislation for DRR is often passed, it is rarely implemented fully. How can DRR institutions that lack political authority or technical capacity better implement DRR plans?

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