The Commission on the Status of Women is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that was established in 1946. It is a global intergovernmental body that is dedicated to the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality. CSW promotes women’s rights, documents the reality of women’s lives around the world, and shapes global standards regarding gender equality. In 1995, CSW played an integral role at the Fourth World Conference on Women in constructing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a progressive blueprint for advancing women’s rights. Today the Commission on the Status of Women addresses emerging issues that affect gender equality and evaluates progress and promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.¹

I. Women in Innovation and Worldwide-Economic Empowerment

Statement of the Issue:

The economic empowerment of women is critical to promoting women’s rights and gender equality on a global scale. The CSW’s concept of the economic empowerment of women includes the ability of women to be equally involved in existing markets, to have equal access and control over productive resources, and to have significant influence in economic decision making at all levels of the economic spectrum. This indicates that women should have control in economic decision making in levels ranging from households to international institutions. The economic empowerment of women not only boosts productivity but also increases economic

diversification. According to a study done in 2016 by the Journal of Human Capital, it is estimated that gender gaps cause an average income loss of 15 percent in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These facts and figures indicate that empowering women economically positively charges the economy.

In 2018, a World Bank Group project, Women, Business, and the Law (WBL), created a report to develop a better understanding of how women’s employment is affected by legal discrimination. The report found that 104 of 189 economies assessed still implement laws preventing women from working specific jobs. 59 of those economies implement no sexual harassment in the workplace laws and in 18 of those economies husbands can legally prohibit their wives from employment. According the WBL report, economies in the Middle East and North Africa legally discriminate against women in the workplace the most. This result was indicated by the WBL index score, which is calculated by how a country’s legal policies restrict women in the following areas: travel and mobility, career trajectories, pay, marriage, having children, entrepreneurship, managing assets, and receiving a pension. Belgium, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden scored 100 in the WBL index, which means that women are on equal legal standing with men across all eight of the above indicators in these economies. The United States scored below countries such as Columbia, South Africa, and Kenya on the WBL index.

The legal restrictions most of the world’s economies impose on women in the workplace inherently effect women’s participation in the global workforce. Women are more likely to be unemployed than men, they are less likely to participate in the labor market as a whole, and are globally paid less than men. Further, women are less likely to be entrepreneurs than men, only 5% of Fortune 500 CEO’s are women. CSW has

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been and currently continues to actively address and tackle these discrepancies in opportunity. At the 1995, Fourth World Conference on Women, CSW played an integral role in defining a framework for change in women’s empowerment and gender equality by creating the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Platform for Action recognized numerous rights for women such as, the right to live free from violence, to receive an education, to participate in decisions, and to earn equal pay.\(^7\)

UN Women and CSW built off the foundation of rights that the Platform for Action created by establishing the UN Women Global Innovation Coalition for Change (GICC). The GICC partners with representatives from the private sector, non-profit institutions, and academia to develop the innovation market to help assist in the development of women’s careers. Goals of GICC include: building market awareness for products made by women that cater to women’s needs, identifying barriers in women’s advancement in innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship, and addressing these barriers at industry-wide levels. GICC has developed programs such as the Gender Innovation Principles and She Innovates Global Program to achieve its goals. Current organizations and companies that have representatives in the Global Innovation Coalition for Change include Amy Poehler’s Smart Girls, Dell, Facebook, and JP Morgan Chase.\(^8\) Many powerful companies and non-profit institutions have pledged to help empower women economically and promote gender equality but they have not fully pledged enough of their resources to create systemic change in the innovation industry.

**History:**

Since biblical times, women have been thought to be economically dependent on men, specifically dependent on their husbands and fathers. Throughout the course of history, women have advocated for their economic independence as a tool to promote gender equality. Progress began to be achieved in the 16\(^{th}\) century when Revolutionary France gave women equal inheritance rights. In 1848 in New York, the Married Woman’s Property Act was passed, which allowed women to enter contracts.

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independently, collect rents, receive an inheritance, and file a lawsuit. In 1850, Iceland became the first country to impose unconditional inheritance rights to women. In 1870, the U.K. followed in New York’s footsteps and passed the Married Women’s Property Act. In 1911, the world celebrated the first International Women’s day. Nearly fifty years later, in 1961, India banned dowries for women before marriage, although this law is still largely ignored. In 1968, the United States and the United Kingdom make it illegal to make “help wanted” ads specifying gender. After World War II, many women entered the workforce, this forced countries to start passing more regulations on workplace equality. In 1983, France required companies to carry out comparative salary surveys. In 1985, Japan passed an equal employment opportunity law. These are all specific instances of countries, or groups of nations, passing economic legislature to promote gender equality.

The international community and the UN’s history of passing laws to promote women’s economic empowerment began in 1946, when the Commission on the Status of Women was founded. In its early years, CSW ensured that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included language about gender equality, “…the equal rights of men and women.” In 1975, the UN held the First World Conference on Women; the results of this conference yielded the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against (CEDAW) Women in 1979. CEDAW is considered an international bill of rights for women. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development, reproductive health was included for the first time in an international policy document. This Conference resulted in a Program of Action that laid out recommendations related to safe pregnancy and delivery, prevention of STI’s, and the elimination of harmful practices against women. The UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women was held in 1995, which resulted in the unanimous adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by 189 countries. The Platform for Action helped fight all forms of

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discrimination against women. In 2010, the UN General Assembly created UN Women, an entity dedicated to achieving global gender equality.¹⁰

**Analysis:**

Advocates for women’s empowerment and gender equality are gaining leverage on a global scale, as companies and institutions begin to feel pressure to adapt equal opportunity policies. Advocates and resources to support change, however, are unevenly distributed throughout the globe. Women in less-developed countries do not enjoy the same resources that women in developed countries do, especially when they attempt to campaign for economic empowerment and equal rights and opportunity. Further, according to the WBL study mentioned earlier, women in less developed countries experience worse legal discrimination than women in developed countries.¹¹

There have been recent advancements in women’s rights, but they have been unequally implemented throughout the globe due to uneven allocation of resources and ability to access the resources that are available.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will address structural barriers that hinder progress towards the economic empowerment of women. The Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality targets ending all discrimination of women everywhere, recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through social protection policies, and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making. These targets are just a few of many that the Sustainable Development Goals address in order for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women at all levels. A cornerstone issue in solving the gap between the participation of men and women in the innovation market place is providing young girls with the education and motivation to succeed in this industry. The Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality targets legislation that is discriminatory against girls receiving an education and promotes strengthening of policies and enforceable legislation for

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gender equality. CSW and U.N. Women hope that these efforts will help to more evenly allocate resources for women empowerment across the globe.

Women’s rights activists in China demonstrate the challenge of advocating for empowerment while dealing with uneven allocation of resources and access to resources that will aid their campaign. Chinese companies are known to include gender discrimination in their hiring and advertisement practices. On Chinese ads for job postings, a stipulation for the qualifications for the job could include “male.” Although Chinese laws ban gender discrimination in hiring practices, the laws are vague as to what constitutes gender discrimination and how to enforce violation of these laws. Chinese women’s rights activists are not on equal footing with the rest of the international community when trying to raise awareness about Chinese gender discriminatory practices because of government censorship of the internet and social media. Advocates for Chinese women’s economic empowerment are at risk of retaliation for their activism.

Conclusion:

Economic empowerment of women in innovation is a key factor in ensuring gender equality on an even and global scale. Discriminatory legislation, uneven allocation and access to resources, and a lack of emphasis on the need for girls to receive education are obstacles impeding the process of achieving gender quality. CSW’s commitment to the economic empowerment of women gives women who have no opportunity to speak their minds, a voice for change and a way to move gender equality forward worldwide. CSW and the international community must strengthen their commitment to ensuring gender equality by partnering with local governments and the private sector to draft legislation that incites and incentivizes change.

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Questions:

- What does the economic empowerment of women look like in less-developed countries?
- What strategies can CSW employ to incentivize governments to change discriminatory policies?
- How does the international community incentivize women to join the innovation industry and to become entrepreneurs?
- What role do developed countries have in advocating for gender equality in less-developed countries?
II. Increasing Involvement of Women in Political Participation

Statement of the Issue:

A foundational obstacle in pursuing gender equality and women’s empowerment is the lack of political and government leadership roles women hold. The lack of women’s participation in politics and absence of women as political leaders results in an underrepresentation of women and their agenda’s in national governments. The lack of current women in positions of power, the existence of economic inequality, and other social issues, such as lacking respect for motherhood and caregiving, all deter women from participating in the political field. A study conducted by the National Democratic Institute found that female political leaders tend to work across party lines, be responsive to constituents, help secure lasting peace, encourage participation in democracy, and prioritize health care and education. \(^\text{14}\)

As of 2019, women make up 24% of members of national legislative bodies globally. There is no country in the world that has achieved gender equality in their national legislature. Nordic countries such as Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden hold the highest share of female parliamentary members. Regions such as South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, have the smallest shares of women legislators with around 17% of their legislators being women. \(^\text{15}\) The percentage of women in national legislatures has become a measure of gender parity for political participation. On a global scale, the average amount of women in national legislatures has increased but the amount of women in political leadership positions does not accurately reflect women’s share in society.

Iceland’s legislature reflects how women are encouraged to vote when they are represented in their national legislatures. Currently, 38% of Iceland’s parliament members are female. Due to female representation in government decisions, Iceland has created and enforced legislature aimed to help its female constituents. Iceland implemented mandatory quotas for company boards being that at least 40% of the


board must be comprised of female members. Icelandic companies are audited every three years to demonstrate that there is no pay discrimination between female and male employees. Further, Iceland offers 9 months’ shared leave at 80% pay for childcare and paternal leave. These policies are the result of female representation in government and lobbying for social mechanisms that protect families and working parents. Additionally, these policies allow for females to more easily become involved in politics.

In 2011, CSW and U.N. Women helped to create the U.N. General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation which called on U.N. Member States to take measures to promote gender equality in politics. The resolution stressed the importance of reviewing how electoral systems impact the political participation of women, encouraging parties to remove all barriers that discriminate against women, and promoting awareness of female participation in the political process at the community, local, and national levels. The resolution also called for Member states to encourage greater involvement of women who might be marginalized, such as indigenous women and disabled women.  

History:

In 1848, the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, USA. This convention sparked the fire of the women’s suffrage movements across the globe. In 1873, New Zealand became the first self-governing nation to allow women to vote. The women’s suffrage movement gained traction globally in 1911, with the celebration of the first ever International Women’s Day. The movement spread to Africa in 1929, when the Igbo women of Southeastern Nigeria protested against undemocratically elected chiefs, eventually forcing them to resign and to drop taxes imposed on the women. Throughout the early 1900s, countries across the globe began to legalize women’s rights to vote. In 1946, after the founding of the United Nations, the Commission on the Status of Women was formed to exclusively champion women’s rights. In 1960 the Mirabal sisters of the Dominican Republic protested against the dictator Rafael Trujillo and were brutally assassinated. Their deaths prompted an anti-

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Trujillo movement which resulted in the toppling of the dictator. In 1975, 25,000 Icelandic women gathered in Reykjavik to protest economic inequality, this protest is known as the “Women’s Day Off.” In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is formed. CEDAW yields what is called the “Women’s Bill of Rights” which is the most comprehensive document to date used to protect the human rights of women. The document legally binds signatory governments to end all forms of discrimination against women. In 1985, only 6 women held the highest positions of state in the world. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted, which contained a road map for 12 critical areas to advance women’s rights. Throughout the 21st century, women’s participation in politics began to take new forms of protesting and women’s empowerment. Women began to use social media as a tool of digital activism. Hashtags such as #SendaAnlat, #EverydaySexism, #MeToo, and #FeministFriday, demonstrate how women have capitalized on social media and used it as a tool to form campaigns, create awareness, and give everyone a platform to connect with other women in similar circumstances.  

In 2003, the Liberian civil war drove thousands of Liberian women to protest the lack of a resolution to find peace between war lords in their country. The protest was a sex strike led by Leymah Gbowee, a visionary leader who organized the women of Liberia by starting a grass roots movement of Liberian women withholding sex from their husbands. The strike encouraged men in the community to voice the women’s concerns about finding a resolution for peace. The protest was successful under the leadership of Gbowee in ending a 14 year civil war and leading to the election of Africa’s first female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This protest demonstrated the power of women’s participation in politics and how effective organization and solidarity of women can incite positive change within national governments.

Analysis:

In 2018, women comprised 49.55% of the world’s population yet in 2019, women only make up 24% of members of national legislative bodies globally. The math is simple, and the conclusion is clear, women are under-represented in their governments. Centuries of discrimination, fear, tradition, and religion have deterred women around the globe from entering politics. Today, discrimination against women is not as easily detected as it was in the past because it can come in the form of implicit bias. Hostile work environments and negative stereotypes are examples of implicit bias. This type of bias does not require intent to exclude women and it does not necessarily produce direct harm to an individual, but it does create a context in which women fail to reach their full potential. Often times, when women are running for or involved in politics, they experience implicit biases that create obstacles in reaching their full potential. Women are often held to higher standards than men, active women in politics often get less support from party leaders, and common public opinion is that family responsibilities do not leave time for political careers.

Implicit bias exists in societies that frown upon explicit bias, but there are still countries that outwardly discriminate against women’s involvement in politics. In 2017, Saudi Arabia lifted a ban on women driving, meaning they were previously fully reliant on males for transportation. This is an example of an obstacle preventing women’s participation in politics that has been systemically built into societal law. Women in Saudi Arabia could not transport themselves to political gatherings, places of governing, or even to institutions that would give them access to resources from which a women could become empowered. The United Nations does not have a mandate to interfere in Saudi Arabian law; however CSW and U.N. attempt to empower the women of Saudi Arabia by giving women’s rights activists a voice by inviting them to conferences centered on women’s empowerment.

Whether women are implicitly or explicitly discouraged from participating in politics, civil society must completely reevaluate political systems by removing obstacles.

that impede women from reaching political leadership roles. CSW and U.N. must encourage civil society to abandon their biases and to fully accept and support the concept that women in positions of political power is the new norm and should be accepted as a standard. Giving women equal chances and opportunity to lead, and breaking down barriers to entry, will allow females to enter political fields without fear of discrimination.

**Conclusion:**

Gender inequality in politics affects women from all walks of life and stems from cultural and traditional practices that hinder women’s empowerment. The under-representation of women in national governments leads to lack of a focus on women’s related issues and discourages women from participating in politics. Women experience implicit and explicit biases along with obstacles systematically built into societal law that prevents their political participation. In order to encourage this participation and motivate women to become politically active, civil society must re-evaluate current government political systems and political parties. Increased political participation of women is the key for a country’s future sustainable growth and CSW and U.N. women need more support in conveying this point to the international community.

**Questions:**

- How does the media (social, print, television) affect women’s political empowerment and participation?
- To what extent, or not, should the United Nations and the international community interfere in local politics in order to promote gender parity?
- When the U.N. does not have a mandate to interfere, what other mechanisms or approaches can be utilized to promote change in political systems, and what is the role of civil society?
- Are quotas in government an effective tool to put women in leadership positions?
- What role do male leaders have in promoting their female peers to positions of power and leadership?