

Montessori Model United Nations

MMUN 2012



Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Dear Delegates,

It is my great honor to welcome you to the 2012 Montessori Model United Nations, and in particular, to the Committee on Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

ECOSOC will address the following topics at the April conference:

- 1) Increasing women's control over economic resources and their access to financial resources
- 2) Achieving the three targets of the first Millennium Development Goal, to reduce poverty by 2015

This Background guide is created to help you become familiar with the two topics. Your job as an Ambassador of a particular country is to research these topics thoroughly in advance. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the MLA format.

The MLA format may or may not be strictly adhered to in this Background Guide because the primary purpose is to provide you the initial launching pad to pursue your research on the two topics.

I encourage you to find how your particular country views these topics, what it is currently doing to improve the related situation. You should also understand how these issues are affecting other countries of the world. Your understanding of the topics through research will be key to a successful debate that would influence the Resolution writing process.

We forward to working with you to debate and draft resolutions. See you in New York!

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MONTESSORI MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2012



History:

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is comprised of 54 Member States of the United Nations. Historically ECOSOC is responsible for promoting international discussion about issues related to employment and standards of living, economic, social and health concerns, educational and cultural topics, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Purpose and mission statement:

The Council holds several short sessions and many preparatory meetings, round tables and panel discussions with the members of civil society throughout the year, to deal with the organization of its work. It holds a four-week substantive session in July, alternating between New York and Geneva, which is organized in four segments (High-level, Coordination, Operational Activities, Humanitarian Affairs and General Segments). At the High-level Segment, national cabinet ministers and chiefs of international agencies and other high officials discuss major economic, social and environmental policy issues. A Ministerial declaration is generally adopted on the theme of the High-level Segment, which provides policy guidance and recommendations for action. The official languages of the Economic and Social Council are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The year-round work of the Council is carried out in its subsidiary and related bodies.

What are the new functions of the Economic and Social Council? The 2005 World Summit ([A/RES/60/1](#)) mandated the Economic and Social Council to convene Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMR) and biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). These new functions were endorsed by the General Assembly in November 2006 ([A/RES/61/16](#)).

Membership and authority:

ECOSOC has 54 member Governments which are elected for three-year terms by the General Assembly. Seats on the Council are allotted based on geographical representation with fourteen allocated to African States, eleven to Asian States, six to Eastern European States, ten to Latin American and Caribbean States, and thirteen to Western European and other States.

The Bureau of ECOSOC includes one Government from each of five world regions – Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, East Europe, and West Europe and the other developed countries. Each year, a representative from a different region is chosen to head the Council as its President.

The functions and powers of the Economic and Social Council are stipulated in **Chapter X** of the **Charter of the United Nations**. The complete text of the UN Charter is accessible at: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>.

Topic I: Increasing Women's Control Over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources



Introduction:

Former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan stated in 2006 that “It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half of the human race. As study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.” This means that focusing efforts on the women of the world will not only help them achieve equal status with men, but will help lift the world out of poverty as well. As it stands, the situation is rather dire. Discrimination and lack of opportunity for women result in economic effects such as low income levels, few or no rights to property ownership, and little access to financial resources, as well as social effects such as reduced access to healthcare and education. According to the United Nations International Fund for Women (UNIFEM) there are five main points to consider related to this issue: 1) economic participation, 2) economic opportunity, 3) political empowerment, 4) educational attainment, and 5) health and well-being.

Background:

Though this topic specifically refers to women's access to financial resources, it is an issue that has everything to do with equality, education, and health, which makes it very important to discuss. The unfortunate fact is that no country in the world has been able to successfully eliminate the gender gap. The most successful in doing so have been Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand Norway, and the United Kingdom. The situation is the worst on the African continent, Southeast Asia, and to some extent, Latin America. A UN statistic reports that only one percent of titled land in the world is owned by women. This is because in many parts of the globe, it is expected that a woman's role is nothing more than taking care of the children and cooking. Women are frequently not respected and thus believed to be unable to productively participate in society and in the household, through activities such as voting and making budgeting decisions. This causes women to remain stuck in a cycle of poverty and marginalization.

In situations of great poverty, it seems that women suffer more than their male counterparts. For example, in facing difficult circumstances such as famines or droughts, more girls die than boys because boys are given priority when resources are scarce. Frequently, difficult financial situations in families pose a problem, not only because incomes are low, but because much unwise spending tends to occur when women do not have a voice in the matter. Studies have produced evidence that when women are allowed to control family spending, wiser choices are made such as spending for education or starting small business endeavors rather than purchasing unnecessary vanity or “luxury” items such as alcohol. In many poor areas, spending on luxuries outweighs spending for children’s education nearly tenfold. Education for daughters is often seen as a luxury item, something that would change if women were allowed to control even part of the family’s finances. An example of the benefits of women having control over money is seen in Indonesia, where women are allowed to control the portion of money that they bring into their marriage. A study found that when women have their own spending money, their children tend to be healthier than children of families in which men controlled the money.

Micro financing plays an indispensable role in the financial empowerment of women. Micro financing is when people take out small loans for the purpose of starting a small business to earn money for the household. One success story is that of Saima, a woman in Pakistan who received a loan and used it to begin an embroidery business. Because it was money that she had earned herself, she controlled it and was able to spend it on education for her daughters, helping them break free from the cycle of poverty and marginalization by society. Further, her husband gained more respect for her and went so far as to state “girls are just as good as boys,” when previously he had beaten her for failing to give birth to a son. Hers is not the only good news. An evaluation surveying other women who had taken out micro-loans showed that 34 percent had managed to move above the poverty line, 54 percent were more respected by their husbands, and 40 percent had fewer arguments with their husbands over money.

When women gain control of their own finances they become more likely to earn respect within the family as well as on a national level. As women are given a political voice through voting, their status is automatically raised. In order to gain the support of women, leaders then put more effort into funding programs to support child and maternal health, causing child and maternal mortality rates to drop significantly. When women become more significant players in a country’s workforce, the economy becomes much more successful. After Rwanda’s tragic genocide, 70 percent of its population was female, making the women’s participation in community affairs essential. Women occupy roles as diverse as mayor, president of the Supreme Court, minister of education, director of television, and leaders of village reconstruction efforts. As a result, Rwanda is one of the fastest growing economies and best-governed countries in Africa. Thus, it is apparent that the empowerment of a woman’s financial situation affects not only her household but her entire nation as well.

Possible Solutions:

As previously mentioned, micro-credit has been a huge factor in helping women gain control of economic resources. Organizations such as Kiva make it possible for people to select someone to whom they wish to give a micro-loan and consequently improve their financial situation greatly. Generally these loans have been very successful in accomplishing the goal, however, microfinance leaves some things to be desired. For example, though it leads to great opportunities that would otherwise remain unavailable to women, it fails to address other issues such as women needing to work from home while caring for children (which can cause women's businesses to grow more slowly than men's). Another problem is that sometimes the loan is invested unsuccessfully, causing the interest rate to add up to the point where a woman is left in a worse financial situation than before. Delegates are encouraged to discuss ways to combat these problems to make micro financing more effective, as well as ways to increase awareness of the micro-credit system to encourage participation by donors.

Other solutions to focus on are those not directly related to money. According to micro-financier, Roshaneh Zafar, in order for women to truly gain economic freedom, education is of the utmost importance. If women are educated, they will be better qualified for jobs as well as better able to prioritize and make wise decisions in investments and spending for their families. Further, education will help women gain respect so that they are more likely to be consulted in household matters including finances rather than being left out of family decision-making. Finally, education has the power to make women realize their own potential. As a woman in Burundi said (after learning about how to invest and spend wisely) "Before, I underestimated myself. I wouldn't say anything to anybody. Now I have good ideas." This newfound confidence helped her successfully lift her family out of poverty by starting a business, illustrating how far-reaching the benefits of education are.

Summary:

Increased access to economic and financial resources is a world development issue as well as one of women's rights. Gender inequality is still rampant across the globe, and it is detrimental to the development of economies and societies everywhere, not merely to the women being marginalized. Access to economic resources will mean more than just more money for women. It will have many effects that will ultimately result in a world less fraught with hardship.

Research Questions:

1. How is your country ranked as far as gender equality?
2. Does your country have any cultural norms that prevent women from achieving equal status?
3. Is poverty a problem in your country and if so, what steps involving women have been taken to combat the problem?
4. What is the status of women and education in your country?
5. How is this issue affecting neighboring countries, your continent and the world?
6. If this is not a problem in your country, how can your country become involved in solving similar problems elsewhere?
7. What are some facts, figures and statistics regarding the issue on a national, regional and international level?

References:

<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>
<http://www.unwomen.org/focus-areas/>
<http://www.un.org/News/>

Topic II: Achieving the three targets of MDG 1, “To reduce poverty by 2015”



Introduction:

The United Nations Development Declaration was signed in 2000 with the agreement of 189 Member States that knew radical changes needed to be made. The Declaration consists of eight main targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and without a doubt, the first goal is one of the biggest challenges of all times, “To reduce poverty by 2015.”

Poverty should not be seen as “just another problem.” This issue has been spreading more and more over the years, peaking with the recent economic recession. Additionally, poverty is the root cause of many problems. Not having the necessary income to live means suffering from hunger, a lack of good health and poor or little education. If poverty is not reduced, it seems futile to try to achieve the rest of the Millennium Goals since many are interrelated. For this reason, three targets were defined in the process of eradicating poverty:

- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
- Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people
- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Background:

Distinctions between “the poor” and “the wealthy” have been made in every period of mankind’s history. Even before the Middle Ages, the poor were discriminated against by the rest of society; not having money meant not being considered a citizen. This idea did not start changing until the late 1920’s with the beginning of the great depression. The risk of unemployment affected all classes of people, and the idea of being poor developed into a social problem.

Since then, poverty has been a challenge for every nation. Developed nations view the issue as a social problem, while in many developing countries poverty represents a mortality risk for the nation as a whole.

Since the latest economic crisis, poverty has been increasing, and in order to face this problem we need to look at its causes. Some of the situations that lead to poverty are overpopulation, a high cost of living, unemployment, low wages, and inadequate education. The international community decided to establish three targets as concrete steps in meeting MDG1 by addressing the root causes of poverty.

The first target is looking to reduce by half the proportion of people having an income of less than \$1 a day. The degree of poverty has been lowered in almost every region. The number of people living on \$1.25 a day was reduced between 1990 and 2005 from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion, but this process has slowed down during the past few years due to the recent economic crisis. It is also expected that the economic crisis will push 64 million more people into extreme poverty, when this problem had already been decreased from 46% to 27 % in developing countries, prior to the economic downturn.

An economic recession poses a danger for many businesses and companies, as it eventually can lead to vulnerable employment and higher rates of unemployment. This is why the second target aims for full and productive employment for all. Since women and young people today represent an important part of the economy, they should receive the same opportunities as men.

To all of this, we add the fact that, most of the time, the employee has a family to sustain; reduced income or unemployment means radical change for the whole family, especially related to adequate nutrition. Malnutrition and hunger, especially in developing countries has been a concerning issue for a while. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, there are about 925 million people suffering from chronic hunger. This is an improvement since 2009 when the number had been 1.023 billion, but still stronger actions need to be taken. The percentage of children under five that are underweight is currently around 26% in developing countries, and every three seconds a child dies of hunger or a disease related to it. Hunger creates a vicious cycle of poverty. When children are hungry they do not perform adequately in school. Young people who receive a poor education are less likely to obtain a decent job later in life which would provide for their families.

Possible Solutions:

So far there have been many great achievements toward eradicating poverty; still extreme changes need to be made during the next four years in order to achieve the goal. Many programs and investigations have been running for several years now that have produced positive results, for example, the subsidy programs in Malawi and Ghana which consist of giving people the necessary tools to produce a successful agricultural system. Through this program the economy grows as each country becomes a food exporting nation, and at the same time helps combat hunger. From 2003 to 2005 hunger in Ghana was reduced by about 9 percent, and Malawi was able to reduce the expense of being a fully importing nation. Vietnam's agricultural research and development program is another great example of combating hunger since it reduced the percentage

of underweight children by more than half, from 45 per cent in 2004 to 20 per cent in 2006.

Nigeria's Special Program for Food Security has doubled its agricultural yields, and hence the farmers' incomes, by giving them interest-free loans that can be paid back during the following harvest. In Bangladesh, a different, yet effective system has been used for the past few years; they invested more than a hundred million dollars in Agricultural Input Assistance Cards. These government programs help farmers increase production on their farms or start new ones.

Latin American countries have also created successful employee programs which have resulted in important reductions in poverty rates. Argentina reduced its poverty rate from 9.9 per cent to 4.5 in the first years of the employment program it implemented.

Many nations beyond those currently receiving support need the help of the United Nations programs and supporting member states to reduce their poverty levels. Therefore, it is necessary to continue reinforcing programs such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee in India which assists landless laborers and marginal farmers, the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange which introduces farmers to an exchange system, and a Women's Mango Cooperative providing women farmers the right skills to develop an export system for their products.

Social Watch states that there is still "a long way to go to reduce poverty by 2015" in many developing nations due to economic slowdowns, a lack of food security and poor education. Without the development of programs, these factors may develop into a pattern of an increasing rate of poverty in the upcoming years.

Research Questions:

1. Is this issue a problem in your country/ neighboring countries/ continent?
2. Who and what are the stakeholders of this issue?
3. What are the positions of the various stakeholders on this issue?
4. What strategies/solutions have been attempted?
 - i. What has worked? Why?
 - ii. What has not worked? Why?
 - iii. What could be improved? Why?
5. How has this problem affected your country/ neighboring countries/ continent/ world?
6. If this issue is not a problem in your country, then how can your country become involved?
7. What and how can students like you be involved in the prevention and reoccurrences of the issue?

8. What are some facts, figures, statistics regarding this issue – national, regional, international?

Summary:

Aware of all the problems that poverty causes each nation, the United Nations has committed its primary Millennium Development Goal to significantly reducing poverty by 2015. This is expected to be achieved by focusing on three main targets: the percentage of people that live with an income of less than a dollar a day, the number of people suffering from hunger and the quantity of unemployment in men, women and the youth.

Although the statistics and data show positive changes, the clock is ticking and there are just four years left and lot to do to accomplish the goal. The recent economic crisis has been slowing down progress, and now, more than ever, support of the international community is needed in the poorest developing countries.

There are great examples of governments currently implementing programs and working on their own to eradicate the issue, but now it is time to use those programs as an example for other nations and to act along with the United Nations through the UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and its other organizations and programs.

Reading/Research References:

1. <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>
2. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_1_EN.pdf
3. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
4. <http://www.endpoverty2015.org>
5. <http://www.socialwatch.org/>
6. <http://www.un.org/News/>