



General Assembly Plenary Committee Background Guide 2019

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2019 National Model United Nations Conference in Erfurt, Germany (NMUN • Germany)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the General Assembly Plenary. This year's staff is: Director Jeffrey Thorpe and Assistant Director Norovsuren "Noro" Enkhbaatar. Jeffrey has a Master of Public Administration and his B.A. in Political Science and International Studies from Georgia Southern University. He works as a Research Analyst for the Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts in Atlanta, Georgia, US. Noro holds a B.A. in Economics, Law and Social Sciences from the University of Erfurt. Additionally, she acts as the current treasurer of the Model United Nations project at the University of Erfurt.

The topics under discussion for the General Assembly Plenary are:

- I. Women in Development
- II. Meeting the Fast-Track Commitments to Eradicate HIV/AIDS

As one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, the General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative body of the organization. With universal membership, the General Assembly provides a global forum for world leaders to discuss a variety of topics across the United Nations system. In order to accurately simulate the committee, it will be key for delegates to focus on consensus building and best practice-setting approaches of the General Assembly, as opposed to operational work.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee, please contact the Deputy Secretary-General Marleen Schreier at dsg.germany@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Thorpe, Director
Norovsuren Enkhbaatar, Assistant Director

Table of Contents

Committee Overview	3
Introduction.....	3
Governance, Structure, and Membership.....	3
Mandate, Functions, and Powers	4
Recent Sessions and Current Priorities	6
Conclusion.....	7
Annotated Bibliography	7
Bibliography.....	8
I. Women in Development	10
Introduction.....	10
International and Regional Framework.....	10
Role of the International System.....	12
Economic Challenges and Intersectionality	13
Conclusion.....	14
Further Research	15
Annotated Bibliography	15
Bibliography.....	16
II. Meeting the Fast-Track Commitments to Eradicate HIV/AIDS.....	21
Introduction.....	21
International and Regional Framework.....	22
Role of the International System.....	23
Challenges to Eradicating HIV/AIDS Globally	25
Conclusion.....	26
Further Research	26
Annotated Bibliography	26
Bibliography.....	27

Committee Overview

Introduction

In 1945, following the conclusion of the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) was founded to maintain international peace and security, foster diplomatic relations between states, achieve international cooperation in addressing global problems and promoting human rights, and harmonize state actions towards these ends.¹ Article 7 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) establishes six principal organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat.² Of these, only the General Assembly has universal membership, rendering it a unique forum for discussion within the UN system.³ As the normative center of the UN, the General Assembly is a generator of ideas, a place of international debate, and a hub for new concepts and practices in the political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal spheres.⁴

The **General Assembly Plenary** has six Main Committees. A report is issued to the General Assembly Plenary for each item allocated to a Main Committee.

Governance, Structure, and Membership

All 193 UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly, with each Member State having one vote.⁵ The General Assembly may grant Observer status to intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and non-Member States or entities, which allows them to participate in sessions but does not grant them voting rights.⁶ The General Assembly makes the majority of its decisions via consensus.⁷ When a vote is held, regular decisions require a simple majority of members present and voting, while important decisions require a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.⁸

The General Assembly has six Main Committees that are topically organized around the General Assembly's main fields of responsibility: the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee); the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee); the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee); the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee); the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee); and the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee).⁹ The Main Committees discuss agenda items assigned to them, adopt draft resolutions, and submit a report on their work to the Plenary.¹⁰ The Plenary then considers these reports and "proceeds without debate to the adoption of the recommended resolutions and decisions. If adopted by consensus in the committee, the Plenary decides by consensus as well; likewise, if adopted by a vote in the committee, the Plenary votes on the resolution or decision in question."¹¹ The Plenary may also decide to address an issue without prior reference to a committee.¹²

Each year, the General Assembly's regular session begins on the Tuesday of the third week in September.¹³ Since its 44th session in 1989, the General Assembly has been considered in session

¹ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 1.

² *Ibid.*, Art. 7.

³ UN General Assembly, *General Assembly of the United Nations*.

⁴ Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, 2006, pp. 91, 162; UN General Assembly, *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*.

⁵ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 18.

⁶ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 30.

⁷ New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2017-2018*, 2017, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 18.

¹⁰ New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2017-2018*, 2017, p. 23.

¹¹ Smith, *Politics and Process at the United Nations: The Global Dance*, 2006, p. 161; Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 62.

¹² New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2016-2017*, 2015, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

throughout the year.¹⁴ The busiest period, otherwise known as the “main part of the General Assembly,” lasts from the start of the session in September until the end of December; it includes the general debate and most of the Main Committees’ work.¹⁵ The remainder of the year, or the “resumed part of the General Assembly,” involves thematic debates, consultation processes, and working group meetings.¹⁶ In addition to the regular session, the General Assembly may also hold special sessions on individual issues at the request of either the Security Council or a majority of Member States.¹⁷

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) is the largely ceremonial head of the General Assembly, elected each year by a simple majority of Member States to a nonrenewable one-year term.¹⁸ The PGA’s duties are to facilitate Plenary sessions by directing discussion, managing the administration of meetings, and enforcing the General Assembly Rules of Procedure.¹⁹ The PGA does not preside over all six General Assembly committees separately; rather, Chairs and Vice Chairs are the facilitators of individual committees.²⁰ The PGA also performs executive duties, such as meeting regularly with the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and the President of the Economic and Social Council; communicating with the press and the public; and organizing high-level meetings on certain thematic issues.²¹

As a main organ of the UN, the General Assembly does not report to any other organ.²² It receives substantive and organizational support from two important entities: the General Committee and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM).²³ The General Committee is comprised of the PGA and the 21 Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, as well as the Chairpersons of the Main Committees; all position-holders are elected each session on a nonrenewable basis.²⁴ The General Committee’s main duty, aside from making recommendations on organizational issues, is to allocate agenda items to the Plenary and the Main Committees from a preliminary list received from the UN Secretariat.²⁵ The DGACM acts as the intersection between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and provides valuable technical secretariat support, mainly through its General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division.²⁶ Within the UN Secretariat, other departments and offices offer both substantive and technical support to each of the six Main Committees.²⁷

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The mandate of the General Assembly is defined in Chapter IV (Articles 10-22) of the Charter of the United Nations.²⁸ As stipulated by Article 10, the General Assembly is broadly tasked with discussing “any questions or any matters within the scope of the [Charter] or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the [Charter],” and it may make relevant recommendations to Member States or to the Security Council.²⁹

Functions and powers of the General Assembly include the following:

¹⁴ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 14.

¹⁵ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 15 & 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

²² *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 98.

²³ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24; UN DGACM, *Functions of the Department*.

²⁷ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, pp. 63-68.

²⁸ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Ch. IV.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Art. 10.

- While the General Assembly may address matters of international peace and security, any such matters requiring action must also be referred to the Security Council. Further, the General Assembly may not make recommendations related to any dispute or situation in respect of which the Security Council is exercising its functions.³⁰ The only exception is if the Security Council fails to reach a decision on an issue due to lack of consensus among its permanent members, at which point the General Assembly may convene an emergency special session within 24 hours to address the issue in question.³¹
- The General Assembly may initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international cooperation in the political, economic, social, cultural, educational, or health fields; the development and codification of international law; or the realization of fundamental human rights and freedoms.³²
- The General Assembly may make recommendations “for the peaceful adjustment of any situation, regardless of origin, which it deems likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations.”³³
- The General Assembly may create subsidiary organs “as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.”³⁴ Main Committees are therefore capable of introducing resolutions that can lead to the creation and funding of agencies or meetings, as well as ad hoc committees or working groups, that consider a particular question with the purpose of reporting to the General Assembly.³⁵
- The General Assembly receives and considers regular reports from the Security Council and from other UN organs.³⁶
- The General Assembly considers and approves the UN’s budget and apportions expenses to be borne by individual Member States.³⁷
- The General Assembly “elects the 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council and the 54 members of the Economic and Social Council. Together with the Security Council, but voting independently, it elects the members of the International Court of Justice.”³⁸
- The General Assembly also elects the members of its subsidiary bodies, such as the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.³⁹
- Based on the recommendation of the Security Council, the General Assembly appoints the Secretary-General.⁴⁰

Only resolutions adopted by the Plenary are put into effect as official resolutions of the General Assembly.⁴¹ However, unlike Security Council resolutions enacted under Chapter VII of the Charter, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding on Member States even after adoption by the Plenary.⁴² Nonetheless, General Assembly resolutions represent policy norms reached by consensus among Member States, and they often lead to concrete action by the international community.⁴³

³⁰ Ibid., Arts. 11-12.

³¹ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 15.

³² *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 13; UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*.

³³ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 14.

³⁴ Ibid., Art. 22.

³⁵ Weis, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 2004, p. 161.

³⁶ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 15.

³⁷ Ibid., Art. 17.

³⁸ New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2017-2018*, 2017, p. 12.

³⁹ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁰ New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2017-2018*, 2017, p. 12.

⁴¹ UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

The following priorities for the UN were adopted for the period 2018-2019 in the General Assembly resolution 71/6 of 27 October 2016:

1. Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent UN conferences;
2. Maintenance of international peace and security;
3. Development of Africa;
4. Promotion of human rights;
5. Effective coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts;
6. Promotion of justice and international law;
7. Disarmament;
8. Drug control, crime prevention, and combating international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.⁴⁴

For the biennium 2020-2021 the priorities have not yet been adopted by the General Assembly. The Committee for Programme and Coordination, which set the priorities for the current biennium 2018-2019, recommended that the General Assembly review all 28 program plans of the proposed programme budget for 2020, ranging from security- and human rights-related to social and economic topics, at its 74th session.⁴⁵ The latest 73rd General Assembly session (UNGA73) opened on 18 September 2018 and was followed by high-level meetings and the annual general debate from 24 September – 1 October 2018.⁴⁶ During the high-level meetings of UNGA73, the UN General Assembly came together for the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, a high-level plenary meeting on global peace, as well as a high-level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis; a review of progress towards preventing and controlling non-communicable diseases, and a high-level meeting on the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative.⁴⁷ The latest General Assembly Plenary sessions took place in June and July 2019. During the 95th and 96th meeting the body concluded a two-day debate on responsibility to protect, prevention of genocide, and crimes against humanity.⁴⁸ In addition to that it adopted three draft resolutions: on assisting victims of terrorism, commemorating the anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development and on torture-free trade.⁴⁹ In its 101st meeting on 25 July 2019 the General Assembly Plenary adopted five resolutions including to establish the 2021 International Year for Ending Child Labour, to promote cooperation with regional partner organizations, and to foster a culture of peace and "respect and acceptance of differences, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cohabitation and respect for human rights, to reject the spread of hate speech, that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence."⁵⁰

The 74th session of the General Assembly (UNGA74) is scheduled to begin on 17 September 2019.⁵¹ The President of UNGA74 will be Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the UN, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande who stated that "Peace and security, poverty eradication, zero hunger, quality education, climate action

⁴⁴ UN General Assembly, *Programme planning (A/RES/71/6)*, 2016, para. 4.

⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (A/74/16)*, 2019.

⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, *High-level meetings of the 73rd session*, 2019.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ UN DPI, *General Assembly Adopts Texts on Torture-Free Trade, Assisting Terrorism Victims, Anniversary of Cairo Population Conference (GA/12160)*, 2019.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UN DPI, *General Assembly, Adopting 5 Texts, Establishes 2021 International Year for Ending Child Labour, Promotes Cooperation between United Nations, Regional Organizations (GA/12167)*, 2019; UN General Assembly, *Resolutions of the 73rd session*, 2019.

⁵¹ IISD, *74th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 74)*, 2019.

and inclusion will constitute a major priority of [his] presidency.”⁵² He also put the promotion of human rights, women’s and youth empowerment, and gender parity within the UN system at the top of his agenda.⁵³ UNGA74 will also commemorate the founding of the UN 75 years ago being “a unique opportunity for us to reduce the trust deficit between nations.”⁵⁴ The general debate and high-level gatherings will commence on 24 September 2019 and include the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development which will take place at the level of heads of states and governments this year.⁵⁵ It is the first SDG Summit since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015.⁵⁶ The same week will also see the Climate Summit focusing on “energy transition, climate finance and carbon pricing, industry transition, nature-based solutions, cities and local action, and resilience.”⁵⁷ Other high-level meetings include the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, the High-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage, as well as the high-level meeting to review progress made in addressing the priorities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through the implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.⁵⁸

Conclusion

As the “chief deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the UN,” the General Assembly plays a key role in the UN system as “a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter.”⁵⁹ Outcomes reached by the General Assembly may define new norms that can promote peace, human rights, and development.⁶⁰ Going forward, the General Assembly will continue to be a cornerstone of international efforts towards a better world.⁶¹

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This handbook, published annually by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, is an effort to improve the information available to the international community on the UN system. It provides extensive information on the structure and membership as well the purpose of UN organs. As such, it represents the perfect introduction to the UN system as a whole for individuals less familiar with its complexity. Therefore, delegates should consider this a must-read during preparation for the conference.

Sciora, R., & A. Stevenson. (2009). Planet UN: The United Nations Confronting the Challenges of the 21st Century. Geneva: Editions du Tricorne.

Inspired by the documentary Planet UN, this book offers an in-depth analysis of the role of the United Nations and its challenges for the 21st century. It gives special attention to three pillars: peace, development, and human rights. It also stresses the importance of the UN's ability to adapt itself to our changing world and to react to new threats such as terrorism or nuclear risks. An account of the genesis of the UN also allows delegates to understand how the UN was started with the intent of creating a system to maintain peace and security and to become the organization it is today. Furthermore, this book

⁵² UN News, *Newly-elected Nigerian UN General Assembly President pledges focus on ‘peace and prosperity’ for most vulnerable*, 2019.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ IISD, *SDG Summit*, 2019.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ IISD, *Climate Action Summit 2019*, 2019.

⁵⁸ IISD, *74th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 74)*, 2019.

⁵⁹ UN General Assembly, *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*.

⁶⁰ Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, 2006, p. 162.

⁶¹ Sciora & Stevenson, *Planet UN: The United Nations Confronting the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 2009.

contains a series of testimonies of important personalities such as the last five Secretaries-General of the UN.

Switzerland, Permanent Mission to the United Nations. (2011). *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. Retrieved 13 July 2016 from: https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/InternationaleOrganisationen/Uno/UN-pgahandbook_en.pdf

This publication by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN is another contribution by a Member State of introductory information about the UN system. The General Assembly is a central focus of this handbook. A detailed description of its organization, structure, rules, and working methods can be found. Further providing information specific to all six Main Committees, this handbook offers a unique source of information to delegates to understand the work of the General Assembly and its place within the UN system.

Thakur, R. (2006). *The United Nations, Peace and Security*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. *Ramesh Thakur, a renowned commentator on the UN, examines the UN from a contemporary perspective in the context of factors such as human security. The author focuses on questions related to international peace and security. By doing so, he critically analyzes the use of force by the UN with the intention of making it more effective in the light of today's threats and with a particular focus on security and how it has evolved over the years and the role of the UN system including the General Assembly. His book is a valuable guide to the UN and offers an interesting perspective on international peace.*

Weis, T., et al. (2004). *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. *This book aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of international governance and the UN, human rights and humanitarian affairs, and building peace through sustainable development. While the authors outline the failures of collective security and the problems that the UN is facing when maintaining peace by military means, they address the role played by other UN entities such as the General Assembly in international security. As such, this book questions and analyzes how the international community governs itself by outlining its successes and failures.*

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I. Women in Development

“Investing in women and respecting their human rights is the surest way to lift communities, companies and countries, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The longer we put off gender equality, the more we lose.”⁶²

Introduction

To this date, all countries have yet to achieve full gender equality; not a single nation improves the lives of women and girls sufficiently.⁶³ While gender parity has been realized in primary education and more women are participating in the labor market and politics, inequality remains a barrier to a sustainable future.⁶⁴ Socioeconomically, not only do women still earn only 77 cents on the dollar compared with men and make up just 13% of agricultural landholders but are also disadvantaged as they do the majority of unpaid care and domestic work.⁶⁵ 2.7 billion women are still legally barred from having equal opportunities to choose jobs as men, further proving that inequality and discrimination are systemic.⁶⁶ Within political leadership, women make up on average 24% of national parliamentarians, with some countries having no female representation.⁶⁷ Furthermore, women suffer from structural gender-based discrimination in developing and developed countries as women lack protective regulations on inheritance rights, sexual and reproductive health, and physical and/or sexual violence.⁶⁸ Movements such as MeToo, NiUnaMenos, and Time’s Up made evident that sexual harassment and discrimination is a universal phenomenon that occurs in all private and public spheres with insufficient or non-existing laws protecting women and girls.⁶⁹

While gender equality and the empowerment of women is a human right and a standalone Sustainable Development Goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is also a prerequisite for advancing sustainable development, as women make up half of the world population and need to participate fully to achieve global progress.⁷⁰ Integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into all phases of policy and program implementations (gender mainstreaming) allows for a better evaluation of the ramifications for both women and men and improvements in practice.⁷¹ The United Nations (UN), under Secretary-General António Guterres, prioritizes gender mainstreaming by establishing gender parity and equality in all policies and development efforts among staff members at all levels by 2028.⁷²

International and Regional Framework

The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* laid the foundation for international efforts in support for equal rights of women and men.⁷³ Another milestone was the legally binding 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) which commits States Parties to

⁶² UN Secretary-General, *Secretary-General’s remarks on International Women’s Day 2019 on 8 March 2019, in New York*, 2019.

⁶³ UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women): Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2017, p. 7.

⁶⁴ UNDP, *Goal 5: Gender equality*, 2019.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; UN DESA, *Progress of goal 5 in 2019*.

⁶⁶ World Bank, *Despite Gains, Women Face Setbacks in Legal Rights Affecting Work*, 2019.

⁶⁷ UN DESA, *Progress of goal 5 in 2019*.

⁶⁸ UN-Women, *Women and Health*, 2014; UN, *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, 2019.

⁶⁹ UN-Women, *Towards an end to sexual harassment: The urgency and nature of change in the era of #MeToo*, 2018.

⁷⁰ UN ECOSOC, *Women’s empowerment ‘essential to global progress’*, 2019.

⁷¹ UN DESA, *Gender Mainstreaming An Overview*, 2002, p. v.

⁷² UN-Women, *One year into UN Secretary-General’s System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, 2018; UN-Women, *Gender Mainstreaming*.

⁷³ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

eliminate discrimination against women.⁷⁴ The Convention provides an internationally recognized definition of what is considered discrimination against women, as well as recommendations for States Parties on how to end gender-based discrimination.⁷⁵

In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro adopting the Agenda 21, a global action plan towards achieving global sustainable development.⁷⁶ In the Agenda 21 women were directly linked to sustainable development within a UN context for the first time, calling for the full, equal, and beneficial integration of women in all development activities.⁷⁷ At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) established 12 areas of concern in advancement of women and girls: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.⁷⁸ The Declaration further states that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a prerequisite for equality, development, and peace.⁷⁹ Also, gender mainstreaming was first established within the BPfA as a major global strategy.⁸⁰ The Declaration was considered the “most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women’s rights” and is still an essential document today.⁸¹

The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) concluded with the outcome document *The Future We Want* advocating for “an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and present and future generations” and encouraging social protection for all people regardless of gender.⁸² It is considered a significant step towards inclusive development and efforts to include women in decision-making processes.⁸³ Within Rio+20, the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development was established as the main UN platform on sustainable development.⁸⁴ In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 70/1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”⁸⁵ It includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the standalone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (SDG 5).⁸⁶ The 2030 Agenda also mainstreams gender across several SDGs as the achievement of many development objectives depends on women’s involvement.⁸⁷ The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* of 2015 is another fundamental pillar recognizing women’s roles in sustainable development reducing disaster risk and mitigating the negative impacts of disasters that can undo strides of developmental progress.⁸⁸ Women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and disasters, with a higher likelihood of loss of life and livelihoods.⁸⁹ In peace- and resilience-building as well as disaster response and recovery, women’s transformative and leadership potential remain under-utilized.⁹⁰

⁷⁴ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (A/RES/34/180), 1979.

⁷⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (A/RES/34/180), 1979.

⁷⁶ UN Conference on Environment & Development, *Agenda 21*, 1992.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ UN DESA, *Gender Mainstreaming An Overview*, 2002, p. v.

⁸¹ UN-Women, *The Beijing Platform for Action: inspiration then and now*; UN-Women, *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20*, 2015.

⁸² UN General Assembly, *The future we want* (A/RES/66/288), 2012, p. 1.

⁸³ Association for Women’s Rights in Development, *Rio+20 Outcomes: What Was Agreed and What This Means for Women’s Rights Going forward*, 2013.

⁸⁴ UN General Assembly, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development* (A/RES/67/290), 2013, p. 1.

⁸⁵ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1), 2015, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ UN-Women, *SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*.

⁸⁸ UNISDR, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, 2015, p. 1.

⁸⁹ UN-Women, *Promoting women’s leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction and resilience*, 2019.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Role of the International System

A step the UN General Assembly has taken to monitor development efforts and to control the “effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact” was the implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the UN System (QCPR), which also assesses the progress of the development of women and girls.⁹¹ Under the leadership of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the QCPR calls upon the UN development system to enhance gender mainstreaming and the full implementation of the *UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* introduced in 2006.⁹²

In 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 72/147 on the “Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.”⁹³ It reiterates the importance of full implementation of the BPfA and calls for national, regional, and global reviews on the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.⁹⁴ The session further deliberated on *Women in Development*, adopted in resolution 72/234, on the achievements that have been made since the BPfA in closing gender gaps, especially in health and education.⁹⁵ It also highlights the importance to promote formal economic and political participation of women and girls including equal access to economic resources and education and reducing the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which enables sustained and inclusive economic growth, poverty eradication, and sustainable development.⁹⁶ Other relevant UN General Assembly resolutions in the same year were 72/148 on “Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas” and 72/149 on “Violence against women migrant workers.”⁹⁷ In 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 73/148 and 73/149 addressing sexual harassment as a form of violence against women and girls and female genital mutilation, highlighting the importance of bodily autonomy and mental health for women in achieving equality.⁹⁸

UN-Women is an essential body to advance women’s development and their role in development.⁹⁹ Its current Strategic Plan for 2018-2021 focuses on development programming targeted at women in the context of poverty eradication, climate change, and improving adolescent and maternal health.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is in charge of improving statistical capacity in regards to gender-disaggregated data, which is crucial to address women’s needs and involve men and boys as allies for gender equality.¹⁰¹ In September 2018, UN-Women’s Global Innovation Coalition for Change, a coalition of partners consisting of private sector stakeholders, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions, launched the Gender Innovation Principles initiative providing benchmarks on the inclusion of women in the field of innovation and technology.¹⁰²

⁹¹ UN System, Chief Executives Board for Coordination, *Enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact of United Nations operational activities for development*, 2016; UNDP, *Gender and crisis response and recovery*, 2019.

⁹² UN General Assembly, *Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/RES/71/243)*, 2016, p. 5.

⁹³ UN General Assembly, *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/72/147)*, 2017, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Women in development: Report of the Secretary-General (A/72/282)*, 2017, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-16.

⁹⁷ UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas (A/RES/72/148)*, 2017, p. 1; UN General Assembly, *Violence against women migrant workers (A/RES/72/149)*, 2017, p. 1.

⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148)*, 2018; UN General Assembly, *Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation (A/RES/73/149)*, 2018.

⁹⁹ UN-Women, *About*.

¹⁰⁰ UN-Women, *UN Women Executive Board endorses the new Strategic Plan, 2018 – 2021*, 2017.

¹⁰¹ UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women): Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2017, pp. 1-8.

¹⁰² UN-Women, *Gender Innovation Principles*.

In 2018, the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) emphasized the empowerment of rural women and girls to accelerate collective action towards the SDGs.¹⁰³ Rural women are essential for transformational change, as they are the main caretakers of families and communities and make up 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries.¹⁰⁴ They play a key role in supporting their households in achieving food and nutrition security, generating income, and improving rural livelihoods and overall well-being.¹⁰⁵ CSW63 focused on “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” and “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development.”¹⁰⁶ It emphasized that women’s full and equal participation and leadership are fundamental for achieving sustainable development and called for improvements in infrastructure, mobility, and access to basic services such as sanitation, water, and health facilities.¹⁰⁷ In 2019, CSW also put the follow-up of the BPfA on its agenda.¹⁰⁸ Gaps and challenges were analyzed, but the lack of data on women hindered sufficient findings.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, a call for better statistical data collection was made.¹¹⁰ Moreover, men and boys are encouraged to take responsibility and challenge discriminatory norms and stereotypes and foster positive patterns on gender equality, non-violence, and respect.¹¹¹

The work of civil society organizations is also fundamental when it comes to the advancement of women and girls.¹¹² *Girl Up*, a global movement by the UN Foundation, empowers young women leaders through leadership training to fight for social change.¹¹³ To advance sustainable development, the women-led Women’s Major Group, created in 1992 at the Earth Summit, facilitates women’s civil society active participation, sharing of information, and advises the UN on policy implementation.¹¹⁴ The Women’s Environmental & Development Organization (WEDO) is another leading organization that strives for social, economic, and environmental justice for women.¹¹⁵ One of its early achievements was the inclusion of gender equality in Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration.¹¹⁶ Today, it still advocates for diversity in leadership and effective implementation for gender-mainstreamed sustainable development policies and practices.¹¹⁷ WEDO is supported by various UN bodies and sponsored by several ministries of foreign affairs and foundations.¹¹⁸

Economic Challenges and Intersectionality

Women’s economic potential is left untapped, and too few countries are adapting to changes needed to implement gender parity within the world of work and follow the path to economic equality and the implementation of equal pay.¹¹⁹ With less income and fewer assets than men, women, particularly single-mother households, are more likely to live below the 50% threshold of median income.¹²⁰ Furthermore,

¹⁰³ UN CSW, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2018/3)*, 2017, pp. 4-9.

¹⁰⁴ UN-Women, *Statement on the International Day of Rural Women, 15 October, 2018*.

¹⁰⁵ UN Women Watch, *Facts & Figures: Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ UN CSW, *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (E/CN.6/2019/L.3)*, 2019, p. 1; UN CSW, *Report on the sixty-third session (E/2019/27-E/CN.6/2019/19)*, 2019, p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ UN CSW, *Report on the sixty-third session (E/2019/27-E/CN.6/2019/19)*, 2019, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ UN CSW, *Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development (E/CN.6/2019/15)*, 2019, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹² UN-Women, *Civil society*.

¹¹³ UN Foundation, *Girl Up – About*, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Women’s Major Group, *About Us*.

¹¹⁵ WEDO, *Vision & Mission*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ WEDO, *HerStory*.

¹¹⁹ UN-Women, *Equal pay for work of equal value*; World Economic Forum, *Closing the Gender Gap*.

¹²⁰ UN-Women, *SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries*.

inequality between women and men in a household is a strong contributing factor to overall income inequality in society.¹²¹ The World Economic Forum points out that with current rates of progress, it will take the international community 202 years to close the economic gender gap fully.¹²² On average, women spend approximately three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men, and significantly more if they have children.¹²³ Such uneven distribution of responsibilities between women and men is a significant constraint for women's completion of, or progress in, education and training, on entry and re-entry and advancement in the paid labor market, and on their economic opportunities and entrepreneurial activities, which can result in gaps in social protection, pay, and pension.¹²⁴ The international community combats these circumstances with a plethora of projects: the UN Development Programme implemented the Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme for Public and Private Enterprise.¹²⁵ It aids to set standards for gender equality in the workplace and reduce gender gaps.¹²⁶ The Women's Empowerment for Resilience and Adaptation Against Climate Change Initiative in Uganda, established by various UN bodies, leveraged more than a quarter million women into economic independency by generating a pool of funds women can borrow and invest.¹²⁷ The Women Entrepreneurship Development Project by the International Labour Organization and the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative by the World Bank are just two examples of efforts by institutions that strive to advance women's economic power.¹²⁸

An aspect that has only recently been highlighted when discussing gender inequality in sustainable development is intersectionality, defined as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination."¹²⁹ CSW points out that gender inequalities always intersect with other forms of discrimination or disadvantages, leaving progress for women and girls unequal.¹³⁰ Multiple and intersecting discriminations, such as class, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, migration status, and others, need to be considered and addressed in gender-sensitive policies and programs.¹³¹ Collecting disaggregated data has the potential to reveal these intersections and challenges of different women in the context of sustainable development and needs to be increased.¹³²

Conclusion

While significant international frameworks such as CEDAW, BPfA, and the 2030 Agenda have allowed for progress towards fulfilling equal rights and women's and girls' empowerment, women still face many challenges and obstacles in participating in their own development. Many are still deprived of their basic human rights and opportunities in terms of palpable change in economic and social development.¹³³ It is evident that a significant number of gaps and challenges to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in sustainable development remain and will only be eliminated with the inclusion of women in all development efforts.¹³⁴ Long-term integrated approaches on improving the collection and analysis of gender data and statistics are required, as well as gender-sensitive programs and policies and the monitoring thereof.¹³⁵ The advancement of women also needs to be addressed from

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² World Economic Forum, *Closing the Gender Gap*, 2019.

¹²³ UN DESA, *Gender equality and women's empowerment in numbers*, 2019.

¹²⁴ UN CSW, *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (E/CN.6/2019/L.3)*, 2019, p. 6.

¹²⁵ UNDP, *Gender Equality Seal for Public and Private Organizations*, 2019.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ UNFCCC, *Women's Empowerment for Resilient and Adaptation against Climate Change | Uganda*, 2019.

¹²⁸ ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Programme; World Bank, Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative Allocates Second Round Funding; Expected to Grow 70,000 Women's Businesses*, 2019.

¹²⁹ UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action*, 2018, p. 31.

¹³⁰ UN CSW, *Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (E/CN.6/2019/15)*, 2019, p. 23.

¹³¹ UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action*, 2018, p. 16-17.

¹³² Ibid., p. 142.

¹³³ UN DESA, *Gender equality and women's empowerment in numbers*, 2019; UN-Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

¹³⁴ UN-Women, *Op-ed: Closing the gender gap in politics*, 2018.

¹³⁵ UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action*, 2018, p. 254.

the perspective of men and boys.¹³⁶ To achieve parity in global leadership and make gender equality an institutional priority, men and boys need to be encouraged to include a gender perspectives in development and be agents of change for women.¹³⁷ Gender equality is not only a development objective in itself but also a strategy to achieve overall sustainable development for all.¹³⁸

Further Research

When researching the topic and preparing for the conference, delegates may consider questions such as: What regional or national plans have been effective in the advancement of human rights for women and girls, and do they meet the needs of women in development? In what ways can the UN General Assembly help promote women in development in addition to their current efforts? How can the UN General Assembly ensure sustainable funding for the advancement of women? How can the international community produce synergies to make the UN more efficient?

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Delegates will find this source helpful as it is the latest document of CSW and shows the interlinkages between women's empowerment and sustainable development. It will aid in finding information on topics such as normative, legal, and policy frameworks, fostering enabling environments for gender-responsive financing, strengthening women's leadership and participation in decision-making, and strengthening gender-responsive data collection.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2015). *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20* [Summary Report]. Retrieved 20 July 2019 from: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1776The%20Beijing%20Declaration%20and%200Platform%20for%20Action%20turns%2020.pdf>

This report reviews the progress of 20 years of BPfA, a landmark for achieving gender equality. Accomplishments and challenges of the empowerment and realization of women's and girls' human rights are examined. It will aid the delegates in understanding the importance of the Beijing Declaration, even today. The document inspects each of the twelve critical areas and points out prognoses and gives explanations for current trends.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. (2017). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women): Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (UNW/2017/6/Rev.1)*. Retrieved 20 July 2019 from: <http://undocs.org/en/UNW/2017/6/Rev.1>

The strategic plan gives outlines, directions, objectives, and approaches to support efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Delegates may benefit from the vision UN-Women has for 2030. It builds on recommendations from the 20-year review and appraisal of the BPfA, highlights UN-Women's contribution to the gender-responsive implementation and strong collaboration among UN bodies.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. (2018). *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* [Report]. Retrieved 20 July 2019 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>

The document gives detailed information on the progress and current difficulties in implementing the 2030 Agenda with focus on gender equality. This is the first report that

¹³⁶ UN-Women, *HeForShe Global Champions for Gender Equality*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ GIZ, *Promoting gender equality and women's rights*.

looks at the Agenda from a gender perspective. Key components are data challenges and monitoring of gender equality. The flagship report also focuses on the intersectionality of issues that women and girls face and offers strategies for action.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 20 July 2019 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>
The resolution is the pivotal intergovernmental agreement that acts as the post-2015 development agenda, succeeding the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals focusing on a sustainably developed future. Within the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, gender equality is not only a standalone SDG but a prerequisite to achieving all the SDGs by 2030. It is the essential document to be referenced by delegates as they analyze the needs of women in development.

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II. Meeting the Fast-Track Commitments to Eradicate HIV/AIDS

“Friends, we know what it takes to turn the tide against this epidemic. It requires every president and prime minister, every parliamentarian and politician, to decide and declare that ‘AIDS stops with me. AIDS stops with me.’”¹³⁹

Introduction

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a disease that is transmitted through certain bodily fluids and works by attacking the human immune system.¹⁴⁰ Left untreated, HIV will weaken the body’s immune system, making a person susceptible to other infections and diseases.¹⁴¹ Over time, an untreated person will progress to the last stage of HIV called acquired immunodeficiency virus (AIDS).¹⁴² To illustrate the harmful effects of HIV/AIDS on the body’s immune system, in 2015, 1.2 million of the reported 10.4 million people who were HIV-positive were diagnosed with tuberculosis.¹⁴³ In that same year, 390,000 of those 1.2 million people died due to HIV-related tuberculosis.¹⁴⁴

The ever-enduring threat of HIV/AIDS has plagued the global community since the disease’s first diagnosis in 1981.¹⁴⁵ HIV/AIDS is a major disease that affects everyone regardless of age, sex, orientation, and social and economic status.¹⁴⁶ In 2017, the number of people reported living with HIV was 35 to 36.9 million worldwide.¹⁴⁷ However, at the height of the epidemic, the number of people living with HIV was 78 million, and almost 35 million died of AIDS-related reasons since the first diagnosis.¹⁴⁸ Although the international community saw a decline of those deaths to about one million worldwide in 2016, there is still an average of 1.6 million new infections reported annually.¹⁴⁹ Currently, the global goal set forth by the United Nations (UN) is to reduce the number of new infections to 500,000 by the year 2020.¹⁵⁰

In June 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 70/266, “Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030.”¹⁵¹ In this resolution, the UN General Assembly establishes the Fast-Track Commitments to Eradicate HIV/AIDS and within those commitments created the “90-90-90” treatment targets to be completed by 2020.¹⁵² The goal of the targets is the following: (1) to have 90% of people, of all ages, living with HIV know that they have HIV; (2) to have 90% of people, of all ages, who know they are living with HIV to be actively receiving treatment; and, (3) to have 90% of people, of all ages, who are actively receiving treatment to have suppressed viral loads.¹⁵³ However, the fast-track strategy has other targets such as: ensuring that 90% of young people are empowered to protect themselves from HIV with access to health services; providing social and legal services for those living with HIV; and assisting with the treatment of diseases associated with AIDS such as hepatitis B and C, syphilis, and tuberculosis.¹⁵⁴ The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Executive Director, Michel Sidibé, stated, “we have bent the trajectory of the epidemic. Now we have five years to break it for good or risk the epidemic rebounding

¹³⁹ UNAIDS, *Update: Kofi Annan’s AIDS legacy*, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *About HIV/AIDS*, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ WHO, *10 Facts on HIV/AIDS*, 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/S-26/2)*, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ UNAIDS, *AIDS*, 2019; UNAIDS, *Global HIV & AIDS statistics- 2018 fact sheet*, 2019.

¹⁴⁸ UNAIDS, *AIDS*, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ UNAIDS, *United Nations Member States stress that critical efforts must be scaled up to end AIDS*, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030 (A/RES/70/266)*, 2016.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ UNAIDS, *Fast-Track Commitments to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030*, 2014.

out of control.”¹⁵⁵ If successful, UNAIDS believes that 28 million new HIV infections and 21 million AIDS-related deaths will be averted between 2015 and 2030.¹⁵⁶ However, though the goal of reducing new infections is possible with recent treatment advances and a functional cure to HIV/AIDS making the disease un-transmittable, many regions, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia are still plagued by HIV/AIDS.¹⁵⁷

International and Regional Framework

In June 2001, the UN General Assembly convened for its twenty-sixth special session to discuss the HIV/AIDS epidemic.¹⁵⁸ The special session was the result of the UN General Assembly resolution 55/13 of 2000, “Review of the problem of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in all its aspects,” that required the UN to put special focus on HIV/AIDS and emphasized a need for action in the coming years. Most importantly, the special session led to the adoption of UN General Assembly resolution S-26/2 of 2001, “Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.”¹⁵⁹ The Declaration is the most foundational document outlining the commitment of the UN to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic worldwide.¹⁶⁰ Also, the Declaration most notably announces HIV/AIDS as a “Global Crisis.”¹⁶¹

Within the Declaration, the UN General Assembly outlines goals and initiatives, much like what was outlined in the *UN Millennium Declaration* of 2000 and the *Abuja Declaration and Framework for Action for the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other related infectious diseases in Africa* of 2001, that are centered around regional and international efforts for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.¹⁶² Furthermore, the Declaration emphasizes the need for gender equality and the empowerment of women as a means to give them the tools to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS as women and girls are identified as vulnerable groups that are susceptible to contracting HIV/AIDS.¹⁶³ Also the Declaration identifies the need to educate and reduce the infection rate by 25% in young men and women ages 15-24 in the most infected areas of the world, as it is critical to the prevention and the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹⁶⁴ To tackle these issues, the Declaration outlines topical areas to focus on that include leadership on the regional, national, and global levels; prevention; reducing vulnerability; assisting orphaned children due to HIV/AIDS; research and development; and follow-up on the progress of implementation on all levels.¹⁶⁵

The Millennium Declaration was the UN’s response to globalization and recognition of the international community’s responsibility to ensure global growth was positive and peaceful for all.¹⁶⁶ The Declaration committed Member States to achieve specific targets by 2015, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹⁶⁷ The Millennium Declaration’s specific emphasis lied on providing assistance to orphaned children and helping Member States in Africa in their attempts to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹⁶⁸ The MDGs highlighted HIV/AIDS as Goal 6 to actively combat and reduce the number of new infections and co-infections of other diseases by the 2015 deadline.¹⁶⁹ Although the global community did not reach complete eradication of the disease, the UN made substantial strides to reach its three targets connected to Goal 6, which emphasized the ideas of treatment and prevention.¹⁷⁰ After

¹⁵⁵ UNAIDS, *Fast-Track strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030*, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ UNAIDS, *Fast-Track Commitments to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030*, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ UN DPI, *Almost 8 Million AIDS-Related Deaths Averted since 2000, Yet Fight Against Global Killer Still Far from Over, Speakers Tell General Assembly (GA/12148)*, 2019.

¹⁵⁸ UN General Assembly, *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/S-26/2)*, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 & 7.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-15.

¹⁶⁶ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2)*, 2000.

¹⁶⁷ UN, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015: Background*, 2019.

¹⁶⁸ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2)*, 2000.

¹⁶⁹ UN, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015: Background*, 2019.

¹⁷⁰ UN, *Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases*, 2019.

the MDGs concluded, the UN refocused and adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹⁷¹ Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs do not have a specific goal focused on the eradication of HIV/AIDS.¹⁷² However, the HIV/AIDS goals were included as targets under SDG 3: “Good Health and Well-Being.”¹⁷³ Specifically, target 3.2 seeks to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.¹⁷⁴

In June 2006, the UN General Assembly convened to review the progress made by the UN with the targets established within the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*.¹⁷⁵ Recognizing that the HIV/AIDS epidemic had grown, especially in the female population, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 66/262 of 2006, “Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS,” which reaffirmed its commitment to combating the disease globally.¹⁷⁶ In addition to addressing gender issues with the rising HIV/AIDS rates, the UN General Assembly emphasized: the need to recommit to prevention, treatment, care, and support for those infected with HIV/AIDS; helping to support national and regional policies that empower governments to meet international commitments; reducing the resource gap by assisting with domestic and international funding that is predictable and sustainable; and consistent follow-up on the work of the UN on these commitments.¹⁷⁷ In June 2011, the UN General Assembly met again to discuss the progress made in eradicating HIV/AIDS and adopted resolution 65/277, “Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS.”¹⁷⁸ Within the new Declaration, the UN General Assembly affirms the tremendous work of the global community to reduce the number of new infections of HIV/AIDS by 25%, while noting that as a community there is still much work to be done.¹⁷⁹ In the Declaration, the UN General Assembly stated that programs must become more cost-effective because their current spending trajectory is not sustainable.¹⁸⁰ To intensify the efforts that the UN General Assembly committed to, it established the fast-track commitments that were more focused on implementation and results to achieve the once articulated goals established by the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*.¹⁸¹

Role of the International System

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the UN General Assembly has made HIV/AIDS a focal point in its work, first through the MDGs and again through the SDGs.¹⁸² At its 70th session in 2016, the UN General Assembly reviewed its overall progress towards the implementation of the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* as previous political declarations dictated.¹⁸³ Disheartened and alarmed by the growth of infections, but encouraged by the innovations made in treatment, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 70/266 which established the fast-track commitments and the 90-90-90 targets for the eradication of AIDS.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷¹ UN, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015: Background*, 2019.

¹⁷² UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁷³ UN, *Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/60/262)*, 2006.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS (A/RES/65/277)*, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² UN, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015: Background*, 2019; UN, *Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases*, 2019.

¹⁸³ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/60/262)*, 2006; UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030 (A/RES/70/266)*, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030 (A/RES/70/266)*, 2016.

UNAIDS was created by the Economic and Social Council in 1994.¹⁸⁵ It was created to lead the UN's initiatives to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.¹⁸⁶ Without UNAIDS, the UN or the global community would not have a strategic plan towards combating the disease.¹⁸⁷ Although the UN General Assembly adopted the Fast-Tracking Commitments, UNAIDS was the leading agency developing the targets and goals of the 90-90-90 treatment targets.¹⁸⁸ Along with the many projects and programmatic areas of UNAIDS, the organization, through the Fast-Track Network and other support, such as the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care and the UN Human Settlement Programme, works to help a network of over 300 cities worldwide with their fast-track commitments.¹⁸⁹ UNAIDS notes that cities are integral in the fighting of HIV/AIDS as the majority of people live in urban areas.¹⁹⁰ With more than half the population of the world living in urban areas, the risk of infection of HIV/AIDS and other diseases grows.¹⁹¹ Though the threat grows, UNAIDS attributes cities as being major leaders in the combat of HIV/AIDS as they are typically seen as areas of positive social change, innovation, and sustainable development.¹⁹²

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the UN's leader in health initiatives worldwide, working under the guiding principle that good health and access to health services is a fundamental human right.¹⁹³ Since 1948, WHO has worked to combat diseases worldwide, including communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS.¹⁹⁴ As a co-sponsor of UNAIDS, the WHO works within UNAIDS with a primary focus on treatment, care, and co-infections of HIV, such as tuberculosis.¹⁹⁵ At its 69th assembly in 2016, WHO endorsed its Global Health Sector Strategy on HIV for 2016-2021, which outlines five strategic objectives.¹⁹⁶ Those objectives include information on knowing the epidemic, covering services needed, focusing on who needs the services, financing the services, and looking towards the future.¹⁹⁷

Organizations like Avert, a United Kingdom charity, have worked for 30 years or more to fight the growing epidemic.¹⁹⁸ Avert's primary vision is to see a world with no new HIV infections and for people to have safe and healthy sex lives.¹⁹⁹ Between 2017-2018, Avert has reached over 13.5 million people worldwide.²⁰⁰ Avert is a contributing organization to the work on the ground to achieve the 90-90-90 targets.²⁰¹ Alongside that commitment, Avert leads many programs worldwide focused on HIV prevention, treatment, and testing.²⁰² At the heart of the work that Avert does, the goal is to change people's behavior to empower individuals to make choices for their self, their sexual health, and healthier sexual practices.²⁰³

¹⁸⁵ UN ECOSOC, *Joint and co-sponsored United Nations programme on human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) (E/RES/1994/24)*, 1994.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ UNAIDS, *About Saving lives, leaving no one behind*, 2019.

¹⁸⁸ UNAIDS, *90-90-90: Treatment for all*, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ UNAIDS, *Fast-Track Cities*, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ WHO, *Constitution*, 2019.

¹⁹⁴ WHO, *About WHO*, 2019.

¹⁹⁵ WHO, *HIV/AIDS*, 2018.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Avert, *Who we are*, 2019.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Avert, *Global HIV Targets*, 2019.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Avert, *What we do*, 2019.

Challenges to Eradicating HIV/AIDS Globally

At a conference in 2016, WHO articulated four significant obstacles that contest the global community's ability to eradicate HIV.²⁰⁴ Those challenges were: Prevention, Treatment, Drug Resistance, and Financing for a sustainable response.²⁰⁵ Some populations have a higher risk of acquiring HIV, such as people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, transgender women, and female sex workers.²⁰⁶ However, young women are generally more at risk with approximately 7,000 women aged 15–24 years becoming infected with HIV worldwide every week and that in sub-Saharan Africa 75% of newly infected between the age of 15-19 are female.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, medicine has made innovation in preventative measures for HIV/AIDS with the creation of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).²⁰⁸ PrEP is a preventative that has seen success rates of up to 92% preventing people from becoming infected with HIV.²⁰⁹ In October 2016, an estimated enrollment of persons on PrEP was reported as 100,000 people, mostly living in the United States.²¹⁰ Two years later, an estimated 380,000 people were reported to use PrEP globally of which 59% reside in North America and 27% in sub-Saharan Africa, namely Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Lesotho.²¹¹ Many countries have not yet introduced any policies or programs regarding PrEP while WHO has set a target for three million PrEP users by 2020.²¹²

Treatment saves lives.²¹³ Although there are proven and sufficient treatment options for people living with HIV/AIDS, there are still challenges faced with providing that treatment to everyone.²¹⁴ It is proven that being treated for HIV reduces a person's viral load to an undetectable status.²¹⁵ Once an individual's viral load has been suppressed to undetectable levels, the virus is untransmittable.²¹⁶ In addition to a suppressed viral load, an individual is less prone to new infections because their body's immune system is less compromised by the HIV infection.²¹⁷ One of the biggest problems with treatment is that people who are living with HIV may not be aware of their positive status.²¹⁸ In 2016, it was estimated that 40% of people living with HIV were not aware of their status.²¹⁹ Despite accessibility to testing, both private and public options, many people chose to not get tested from a fear of living with HIV, people learning their status, or miseducation about condom usage.²²⁰

Drug Resistance and Financing a sustainable response are the other two factors WHO has expressed as significant challenges to eradicating HIV/AIDS.²²¹ About 5% of people who are on antivirals for HIV/AIDS were resistant to at least one of the antiretroviral drugs in 2016.²²² That year, WHO developed the Global Report on Early Warning Indicators of HIV Drug Resistance, which defines indicators that measure the programmatic quality of HIV treatment identifying factors that reduce or increase the likelihood of drug resistance, such as viral load suppression and on-time appointment keeping.²²³ The growing economic agenda and the continually switching priorities of donors are a threat to financing efforts.²²⁴ Currently,

²⁰⁴ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ UNAIDS, *Global HIV & AIDS statistics- 2018 fact sheet*, 2019.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*; WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²⁰⁸ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²⁰⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV/AIDS: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)*, 2019.

²¹⁰ UNAIDS, *Update: Pre-Exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)*, 2016.

²¹¹ Pebody, 380,000 people on PrEP globally, mostly in the USA and Africa, *NAM*, 2018.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ UNAIDS, *Undetectable=untransmittable*, 2018.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ UNAIDS, *Undetectable=untransmittable: Public Health and HIV Viral Load Suppression*, 2018, p. 2.

²¹⁸ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Humphrey, 5 reasons why people put off HIV testing according to Google, *Avert: Professional Resources*, 2017.

²²¹ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*; WHO, *Global Report on Early Warning Indicators of HIV Drug Resistance: technical report*, 2016, p. 9.

²²⁴ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

there is a financial mechanism available, but as Member States grow economically and begin to lose funding from external sources they require that more domestic funds be utilized for HIV/AIDS-focused products, while they may be faced with financial hardships as external funds are decreased or removed.²²⁵ One recommendation WHO poses is to have more countries move towards universal health coverage and access to social protection.²²⁶

Lastly, a contributing challenge to combating HIV/AIDS is defeating the negative stigma associated with the disease.²²⁷ The fear and sometimes hatred geared towards people living with HIV/AIDS makes people more vulnerable to the disease.²²⁸ In some cases of discrimination, people living with HIV have been prevented from receiving life-saving treatments due to their status with a study stating that in 50 countries one in eight individuals were denied health care due to discrimination in 2015.²²⁹ Additionally, some countries have discriminatory policies preventing entry, travel, and residency of people living with HIV/AIDS.²³⁰

Conclusion

The threat of HIV/AIDS has been an influence on global policy since the 1990s.²³¹ Although the world has seen a decrease of over 40% in new infections, HIV/AIDS persists as a global epidemic.²³² Recent advances in treatment and prevention allow people to live normal lives and helps reduce the number of new infections.²³³ The UNAIDS Executive Director stated: “Every five years we have more than doubled the number of people on life-saving treatment. We need to do it just one more time to break the AIDS epidemic and keep it from rebounding.”²³⁴ The international community has to look at how to successfully implement the Fast-Track Commitments, so that the world may see the prevention of new HIV infections and the eradication of AIDS.

Further Research

As delegates move forward with researching the topic, they should consider these questions: How can the UN General Assembly address the need for financing? Can the UN General Assembly enlist more assistance from private-sector entities to fighting HIV/AIDS? In what ways can the UN General Assembly leverage the successes of UNAIDS in the 90-90-90 targets to move towards eradication of HIV post-2030? How can the UN General Assembly further assist with empowering young persons, male and female, to ensure sustainable preventative and treatment initiatives? How can the UN General Assembly address stigmatization around HIV/AIDS? How can the UN General Assembly increase public knowledge on prevention and treatment?

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https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/JC2686_WAD2014report_en.pdf

UNAIDS is the main agency responsible for implementing the General Assembly’s HIV/AIDS initiatives. This report produced by UNAIDS outlines some key statistics and information concerning the implementation of the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ WHO, *WHO flags key challenges to global HIV response at International AIDS Conference*, 2016.

²²⁷ Avert, *HIV Stigma and Discrimination*, 2018.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ UNAIDS, *Global HIV & AIDS statistics- 2018 fact sheet*, 2019.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ UNAIDS, *Undetectable=untransmittable*, 2018.

²³⁴ Avert, *Global HIV Targets*, 2019.

Epidemic by 2030. Most importantly, this source will serve as a visual aid to help shape the gravity of HIV/AIDS worldwide and the universal attempts to eradicate the disease.

United Nations, General Assembly, Twenty-sixth special session. (2001). *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/S-26/2)*. Retrieved 10 May 2019 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/S-26/2>

In response to the Millennium Development Goals, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The declaration is a foundational document outlining the immense burden that HIV/AIDS has put on the international community by describing the disease as a “Global Crisis.” The declaration continues to outline the needs for stable leadership, treatment, care for those inflicted, and prevention.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 10 May 2019 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

The 2030 Agenda is one of the most essential UN documents of modern time as it establishes the majority of initiatives internationally for which the UN is involved. As it relates to the topic of HIV/AIDS, Goal 3 most aligns with international efforts and provides the most legitimacy of the UN’s work towards eradicating HIV/AIDS internationally. After reviewing the targets of General Assembly resolutions focused on HIV/AIDS and the Fast-Tracking Commitments, parallels can be drawn between the high-level priorities of the SDGs and the more detailed commitments of all declarations.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2016). *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030 (A/RES/70/266)*. Retrieved 14 May 2019 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/266>

Attempting to reaffirm its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 70/266 to increase its efforts to eradicate HIV/AIDS. The political declaration calls for international support and leadership on the entire international community. In fear that the successes seen thus far would face a rebound of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in some regions of the world, the United Nations agency UNAIDS urged a fast track response to the global epidemic. Contained within the fast track response, UNAIDS outlines the 90-90-90 treatment targets that aim to decrease transmission, increase treatment, and minimize the other disease associated with HIV/AIDS such as Hepatitis A.

World Health Organization. (2016). *Global Report on Early Warning Indicators of HIV Drug Resistance: technical report*. World Health Organization. Retrieved 13 June 2019 from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/246219/9789241511179-eng.pdf;jsessionid=EA605F9209A74E4211D5DFDDC022AAB5?sequence=1>

The World Health Organization has contributed research and innovations in providing a sustainable approach to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. One of the largest challenges expressed by this organization is drug resistance to HIV antivirals and treatment of HIV/AIDS. WHO has taken account of various factors associated with that resistance. This report is instrumental in providing background information for an approach to creating policies focused on addressing this major challenge.

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Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. (2018, July 20). *Undetectable=untransmittable* [Press Release]. Retrieved 12 June 2019 from: <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2018/july/undetectable-untransmittable>

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