

Women And Human Rights

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Abstract

Women rights are the rights and entitlements claimed for women and girls of many societies worldwide. In some places, these rights are institutionalized or supported by law, local custom, and behavior, whereas in others they may be ignored or suppressed. They differ from broader notions of human rights through claims of an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls, in favour of men and boys. Issues commonly associated with notions of women's rights include, though are not limited to, the right: to bodily integrity and autonomy, to vote, to hold public office, to work, to birth control, to have an abortion, to be free from rape, to fair wages or equal pay, to property, to serve in the military or be conscripted; to enter into legal contracts; and to have marital or parental rights.

In most countries in the world, women have for a long time been treated unequally in respect of men. There are also horrible and scary incidences like where women are forced into early marriage whereas others have children while they are too young. They eventually have to sell their bodies for survival. Majority of them get AIDS while others suffer from physical problems like rape. Supporting girl's education has been pointed out as a key to solving some of the world's greatest problems. In regard to women, girls who are educated are less likely to have a lot of children. They are also less likely to contract sexual diseases and they are also able to contribute to the economic development of their societies and communities. Women's rights are therefore of key importance to solve some of these inequalities and gender biasness all over the world. Women's rights around the world are an important indicator to understand global well-being. This paper attempts to highlight the need for upholding women rights in the context of human rights.

Key Words: Women, Human Rights and Women Rights

Introduction

Women's and girls' rights are human rights. They cover every aspect of life – health, education, political participation, economic well-being and freedom from violence, among many others. Women and girls are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all of their human rights and to be free from all forms of discrimination – this is fundamental to achieve human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development. Moreover, some groups of women face compounded forms of discrimination – due to factors such as their age, ethnicity, disability, or socio-economic status -- in addition to their gender.

Effective ensuring of women's human rights requires, firstly, a comprehensive understanding of the social structures and power relations that frame not only laws and politics but also the economy, social dynamics and family and community life. Gender equality is at the very heart of human rights and United Nations values. A fundamental principle of the United Nations Charter adopted by world leaders in 1945 is "equal rights of men and women", and protecting

and promoting women's human rights are the responsibility of all States. Harmful gender stereotypes must be dismantled, so that women are no longer viewed in the light of what women "should" do and are instead seen for who they are: unique individuals, with their own needs and desires.

Why should women have rights?

Millions of women around the world continue to experience discrimination in the following:

- Laws and policies prohibit women from equal access to land, property, and housing.
- Economic and social discrimination results in fewer and poorer life choices for women, rendering them vulnerable to trafficking
- Gender-based violence affects at least 30% of women globally.
- Women are denied their sexual and reproductive health rights.
- Women human rights defenders are ostracized by their communities and seen as a threat to religion, honour or culture.
- Women's crucial role in peace and security is often overlooked, as are the

particular risks they face in conflict situations.

The universal Declaration of human rights which was adopted by the United Nations general assembly in 1948 outlined the fundamental consensus on human rights of everybody in relation to such matters as freedom of movement, religion and assembly, protection of the law, rights to work, health, education, and citizenship. It clearly points out that these rights are to apply equally to all without distinction of any kind for instance race, color, gender or any other status. This means that these rights are to apply to women as well. Following could be the benefits for the society if women rights are ensured:

- Women have the same ability as men and should therefore have the same rights as men. For a long time human rights have been guaranteed only to men. Women rights therefore help women get acquire the same rights as their male counterparts.
- Women's rights help empower women. Through women's rights, women can access same educational facilities as men. Before women's rights came into being, women were not allowed to go to school and own businesses since their role to stay at home and take care of the children.
- Women's rights are important to help stop torture and inhuman treatment of women. For a long time women have been degraded, tortured hence there was a need for women's right to protect women from torture and inhuman treatment.
- It would be an injustice to benefit from the women contributes to the society without bestowing the same rights as men.
- Women deserve the same degree of respect as men.
- Women's rights help the society evolve. Through women's rights such as right to equality women are able to advance and as a result the larger society too is able to advance and evolve.
- To help stop marginalization. Traditions, cultures, political, social, and economic interests have excluded women from the general human rights and have instead placed women to a secondary or special interests status within human rights. This marginalization of women across the

world has resulted to gender inequality. It has contributed to the perpetuation of women's subordinate status. Women's rights are therefore essential to stop the marginalization of women.

- No one should be denied their rights or have their rights infringed no matter what their sex is. Women have often been treated unequally in respect of men hence the need for women's rights
- Women are oppressed in most institutions; hence need to be liberated through various women's rights such as the right to work among others.
- Women's rights are important to be help fight unjust patterns and structures within society.
- Even in this century women's rights are still important because we haven't achieved real equality.
- Women are more subjected to violence than men hence the need of women's right such as the women's right to be protected from violence and sexual assault.
- Women's rights have helped women advance in many ways. This rights have protected women from torture, violence, sexual, assault, inequality and without doubt there was and there still is a great need for women's rights

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Considered the international bill of rights for women, the Convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. It was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and came into force on 3 September 1981.

The CEDAW Committee

Oversight of the Convention is the task of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a group of 23 independent experts on women's rights from different States that have ratified the Convention. Countries that are parties to the Convention must submit reports detailing their compliance with its provisions every four years. The Committee (the treaty body) reviews those reports and may also hear claims of violations and inquire into situations of grave or systemic contraventions of women's rights.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

In 1994 the United Nations resolved to appoint a Special Rapporteur - an independent expert on the causes and consequences of violence against women. The Special Rapporteur investigates and monitors violence against women, and recommends and promotes solutions for its elimination.

Numerous international and regional instruments have drawn attention to gender-related dimensions of human rights issues, the most important being the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979.

In 1993, 45 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, and eight years after CEDAW entered into force, the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna confirmed that women's rights were human rights. That this statement was even necessary is striking – women's status as human beings entitled to rights should have never been in doubt. And yet this was a step forward in recognizing the rightful claims of one half of humanity, in identifying neglect of women's rights as a human rights violation and in drawing attention to the relationship between gender and human rights violations.

CEDAW: The International Bills Of Rights for Women

CEDAW defines the right of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to protect this right. It establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination, and provides the basis for achieving equality between men and women through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life as well as education, health and employment. CEDAW is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women. The Convention has been ratified by 180 states, making it one of the most ratified international treaties. State parties to the Convention must submit periodic reports on women's status in their respective countries. CEDAW's Optional Protocol establishes procedures for individual complaints on alleged violations of the Convention by State parties, as well as an inquiry procedure that allows the Committee to conduct inquiries into serious and

systematic abuses of women's human rights in countries. So far the Protocol has been ratified by 71 States.

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (ICPD) articulated and affirmed the relationship between advancement and fulfillment of rights and gender equality and equity. It also clarified the concepts of women's empowerment, gender equity, and reproductive health and rights. The Programme of Action of ICPD asserted that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status was a highly important end in itself as well as essential for the achievement of sustainable development. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing generated global commitments to advance a wider range of women's rights. The inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals was a reminder that many of those promises have yet to be kept. It also represents a critical opportunity to implement those promises.

In spite of these international agreements, the denial of women's basic human rights is persistent and widespread. For instance:

- Over half a million women continue to die each year from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes.
- Rates of HIV infection among women are rapidly increasing. Among those 15-24 years of age, young women now constitute the majority of those newly infected, in part because of their economic and social vulnerability.
- Gender-based violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer. More often than not, perpetrators go unpunished.
- Worldwide, women are twice as likely as men to be illiterate.
- As a consequence of their working conditions and characteristics, a disproportionate number of women are impoverished in both developing and developed countries. Despite some progress in women's wages in the 1990s, women still earn less than men, even for similar kinds of work.
- Many of the countries that have ratified CEDAW still have discriminatory laws

governing marriage, land, property and inheritance.

Conclusion

A major global women's rights treaty was ratified by the majority of the world's nations a few decades ago. Yet, despite many successes in empowering women, numerous issues still exist in all areas of life, ranging from the cultural, political to the economic. For example, women often work more than men, yet are paid less; gender discrimination affects girls and women throughout their lifetime; and women and girls are often the ones that suffer the most poverty. Women's and girls' rights are human rights. They cover every aspect of life – health, education, political participation, economic well-being and freedom from violence, among many others. Women and girls are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all of their human rights and to be free from all forms of discrimination – this is fundamental to achieve human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development.

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