**Forum:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** Broadening the scope of women’s citizenship, leadership, and political participation in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

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Introduction

In Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), women continue to face inequality in their citizenship, leadership, and political participation. Despite progress in some areas, discrimination and unequal treatment of women in these countries remains a significant barrier to their full and equal participation in civic and political life. This inequality takes various forms, including limited access to education and employment opportunities, legal and institutional barriers, and social and cultural attitudes that view women as inferior or unequal.

The effects of this inequality are far-reaching and have a significant impact on women, their families, and their communities. Women are often denied the right to own property, access credit, or participate in political life, which limits their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives. In addition, the lack of women in leadership positions perpetuates a gender-biased decision-making process that results in policies that are not responsive to the needs and concerns of women.

It is essential to address this issue, as empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial for the development of sustainable and inclusive societies. Continuing to promote women's citizenship, leadership, and political participation.

Background

History

In many societies throughout history, women have been excluded from full citizenship and political participation, with laws and customs that restricted their rights and opportunities. As well as women being seen as being too emotional or irrational. In many societies, women were not considered citizens in their own right, but were instead defined in relation to their fathers or husbands. They were often excluded from owning property, participating in the workforce, and making decisions about their own lives. These restrictions prevented women from fully participating in political and economic life, and limited their opportunities for leadership and decision-making.

This can be traced back to centuries of patriarchal societies, where men were seen as the dominant group and women were relegated to secondary status. This notion of male superiority was embedded in cultural, religious, and legal systems, leading to widespread discrimination against women. Many religious texts and traditions upheld patriarchal views of society, which relegated women to a subservient role and denied them equal rights and opportunities. Additionally, many societies have placed strict limits on women's mobility, with laws that prohibit women from traveling without a male guardian, or laws that restrict women's ability to participate in public life. Girls were not allowed to attend school, and even if they were, their education was often limited to domestic skills and not given equal weight as that of boys. Furthermore, lacking property rights meant women were prevented from owning or inheriting land, starting a business, or supporting themselves and their families.

**Types of Inequality**

Inequality for women's citizenship refers to the unequal treatment for women when it comes to obtaining and exercising their citizenship rights. This can include restrictions on women's ability to obtain legal documentation, such as passports or national identity cards, participate in political life, own property, or have control over their own bodies and reproductive rights. Women have often been treated as second-class citizens, with their rights and opportunities limited by laws and cultural norms that favored men.

In leadership women have limited opportunities compared to men when it comes to holding positions of power and influence. This can include restrictions on women's ability to take on leadership roles, be promoted to senior positions, or have equal representation in positions of power across various sectors and industries.

Compared to men when it comes to participating in political life, women are more restricted. This can include their ability to vote, run for office, participate in political campaigns and protests, or have equal representation in government and other decision-making bodies. Women were often excluded from voting and running for office, and were relegated to supporting roles in political campaigns and decision-making processes.

Causes

The cause of these inequalities have been rooted in patriarchal norms and beliefs that have historically positioned women as secondary and inferior to men. These attitudes have been reflected in laws, customs, and cultural practices that have restricted women's rights and opportunities, and denied them full citizenship and political participation

One of these causes is the limited access to resources and employment opportunities. Women in LEDCs often have limited access to education and employment opportunities, which affects their ability to participate in political and economic decision-making. Women face restrictions on their ability to attend school, pursue higher education, or access equal pay and equal opportunities in the workplace. For example, there may be a shortage of schools or job opportunities in rural areas, or a lack of financial resources to pay for education or transportation to work.

Another cause is the legal and institutional barriers. In some countries, laws have been put in place that restrict women's ability to attend school or work outside the home. For example, some countries have implemented laws that prohibit girls from attending school, or that limit women's ability to work in certain industries or hold certain jobs. Women may also face barriers to full citizenship, including discriminatory laws, such as those that restrict their ability to own property or inherit land, or those that criminalize sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Cultural attitudes and biases of traditional gender roles also play a major part. This can be seen in various forms, such as the belief that women are not capable of holding positions of power or making important decisions, or the assumption that women's primary roles are limited to being homemakers and caretakers. often view women as secondary to men. Traditional gender roles can limit women's opportunities to participate in political life. For example, in some societies, women are expected to prioritize their family responsibilities over their political careers, or they may face social stigma and criticism for pursuing political ambitions. These attitudes are deeply ingrained in many cultures and are passed down from generation to generation, making it difficult to change them.

Effects

Women in LEDCs often face discrimination in accessing citizenship rights, such as the right to vote, own property, and access education. In some cases, women are denied citizenship altogether, or are unable to pass their citizenship on to their children.

Women who are denied citizenship rights are often unable to access essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which can lead to poverty and economic insecurity. This can also limit their ability to contribute to their families and communities and prevent them from fully participating in the economic life of their country. This may cause women to be vulnerable to violence and exploitation, including human trafficking, sexual violence, and other forms of abuse. This can also have a profound impact on their physical and emotional well-being.

Women's underrepresentation in leadership positions can result in a gender imbalance in decision-making, with male perspectives and interests dominating discussions and decision-making processes. This can lead to policies and programs that do not adequately address the needs and concerns of women and girls. Women's perspectives are critical in shaping political agendas and policies, but without adequate representation, women's issues are often overlooked or given low priority. Women’s unique perspectives, experiences, and skills to leadership positions, and their exclusion from leadership roles limits the diversity of perspectives and ideas that contribute to progress and innovation. This can result in a lack of progress on important issues such as reproductive health, gender-based violence, and economic empowerment for women.

Women leaders often face stereotypes and biases that can limit their ability to lead effectively and advance in their careers. These attitudes can also discourage young women from pursuing leadership positions, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership. This impacts on the women's self-confidence and empowerment. Women who face barriers to leadership may experience feelings of self-doubt and a lack of empowerment, which can limit their ability to contribute to their communities and advocate for themselves and others. Possibly causing the experience of a loss of cultural identity, as they may be forced to abandon their traditional ways of life and cultural practices. This can also have a negative impact on the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations

The UN has been actively involved in promoting gender equality and women's rights since its formation in 1945. One of its main efforts has been to promote the equality of women's citizenship through its various agencies, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now part of UN Women). UN Women is a UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It works with governments, civil society, and other partners to advance gender equality and women's political participation and leadership in LEDCs.

The World Bank

The World Bank has been working to promote women's economic empowerment and increase their participation in leadership roles in LEDCs. In 2011, the bank launched the Women, Business, and the Law project to gather data and monitor legal barriers to women's economic and political empowerment in 140 countries.

African Union (AU)

The AU has made significant efforts to promote women's political participation in Africa, including through its Gender Policy and its commitment to ensuring that 50% of decision-making positions are held by women. The AU has also launched several initiatives aimed at increasing women's political representation and empowerment, such as the African Women's Decade (2010-2020).

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Women’s Suffrage Movement

The Women's Suffrage Movement was a political movement aimed at securing women the right to vote in elections. In LEDCs, the movement took place alongside other social, economic, and political developments, and it faced similar challenges as well as unique obstacles. It emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in various countries around the world. The movement was part of the broader struggle for women's rights, including the right to own property, to receive an education, and to participate in public life. The suffrage movement was led by women who were inspired by the ideals of democracy and equality and who believed that women should have the same rights as men, including the right to vote. The suffrage movement faced significant opposition, including from men who believed that women were not capable of making political decisions and from politicians who were opposed to giving women the vote for fear that it would upset the status quo. Nevertheless, the suffrage movement persisted, and after years of lobbying, picketing, and even going on hunger strikes, women were eventually granted the right to vote in many countries around the world.

International Women's Year

International Women's Year was a United Nations (UN) designated year, 1975, marking the beginning of a decade for women's rights. The year was marked by several significant events, including the first UN World Conference on Women held in Mexico City, which was attended by representatives from over 140 countries. The conference marked a turning point in the recognition of women's rights and led to the creation of the UN Decade for Women. During International Women's Year, the UN adopted a declaration and an action plan, which set out specific goals and targets aimed at promoting equality between men and women and ensuring women's full and equal participation in all areas of life. This was a significant step in addressing the issue of gender inequality and creating a world where women could enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It is often referred to as the "International Bill of Rights for Women." The Convention defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." CEDAW has been ratified by 189 countries, making it the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. The Convention requires countries to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all forms, including in the areas of political and public life, education, employment, and health. It also requires states to take action to eliminate discriminatory cultural practices and laws, and to take steps to eliminate violence against women.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a critical document adopted by the United Nations in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. It outlines a comprehensive strategy for the advancement of women's rights and equality, with a focus on 12 critical areas of concern, including poverty, education, health, violence against women, armed conflict, and the economy. The document serves as a roadmap for governments, international organizations, civil society groups, and individuals to take action towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Possible Solutions

* Education and awareness campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality. working with organizations to promote the inclusion of women in leadership roles. By working with organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these campaigns can educate the public about the importance of equal representation and participation of women in leadership roles. These campaigns can use various media platforms, such as television, radio, and social media, to reach a wider audience and promote a more gender-equal society.
* Address the economic barriers that prevent women from participating in politics. Many women in LEDCs face economic barriers that prevent them from participating in politics. This can include a lack of financial resources to run for political office or difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities. Addressing these economic barriers can involve providing financial support for women to run for political office, supporting women-owned businesses, and increasing economic opportunities for women.
* Ensuring that the political system is inclusive of all citizens is an important step towards promoting gender equality. This can involve implementing policies such as quotas for women in political positions or measures to ensure that women's voices are heard in policy-making processes. Affirmative action, quotas, or other policies that encourage the inclusion of women in leadership positions can help to increase their visibility and influence, and create a more representative political landscape.
* Providing women with equal access to education and employment opportunities can help empower them and increase their political participation. This includes programs aimed at improving women's literacy, access to technology, and job training, which can help women gain the skills and knowledge necessary to become more involved in politics.
* The media can play a powerful role in shaping public perceptions of women's role in society. By promoting positive images of women leaders and challenging gender stereotypes, the media can help to shift attitudes and beliefs about women's capabilities and potential for leadership
* Engaging men and boys as allies in the struggle for gender equality is an important step in promoting gender equality. This includes educating them about the benefits of gender equality, as well as challenging gender stereotypes and toxic masculinities that contribute to inequality. By working together, men and women can help create a more equal and just society where all individuals have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life.