**An Introduction to the ECOSOC**

The United Nations Economic and Social Council is one of the founding bodies of the United Nations.  The goal of ECOSOC is to address issues of economic and social importance including poverty the environment and equality.  The ECOSOC also helps coordinate the work of the regional commissions, functional commissions and specialized agencies that operate as an extension of ECOSOC.  Some of these bodies include the UN Commission on Human Rights, The UN Economic Commission for Africa, The International Monetary Fund, and the Food and Agricultural Organization.  When making policy recommendations to UN member states it is important that the ECOSOC take into account research and recommendations from all of the relevant bodies that work under it.

**Topic I: Effects Of the Financial Crisis on the Gender Gap**

**Understanding the Financial Crisis**

The 2008 Financial Crisis has been considered by many to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.  The cause of the Financial Crisis was a lack of regulation, which allowed for the creation of a housing bubble that was the result of low interest on mortgages.  When the bubble burst this caused a violent crash in the Stock Market and the bankruptcies of major financial Institutions.  These led to a drop in investment and consumption in the economy, which in turn led to a downturn in GDP, which is one of the key signs of a recession.

The symptoms of the Financial Crisis eventually spread to Europe and kick started the Euro Crisis. The Eurozone Crisis was a combination of major European banks going bankrupt for many of the same reasons that American institutions went bankrupt.  What also happened in the Eurozone Crisis was a crisis of sovereign debt.  Countries such as Portugal Italy Greece and Spain (PIGS) all ran high levels of deficit spending in the years leading up to the crisis.  As a secondary result of the housing bubble these countries lost the ability to pay off their debt due to decreases in GDP but also due to constraints in the international financial sector investors were far less willing to buy the government bonds being used to finance these countries international debt resulting in forced bankruptcy from these countries.

A variety of solutions have been attempted in order to stabilize the economy.  The United States implemented a stimulus packages and quantitative easing.  The United States stimulus strategy consisted of multiple bills increasing government expenditure and cuts in taxes with the goal of increasing consumption in order to improve the economy.  In contrast many European countries that high rates of sovereign debt took an opposite approach and chose to undertake austerity measures and have massive cuts in their spending in order to lower their sovereign debt and renew confidence in their government bonds.

**Understanding the Gender Gap**

The international gender gap is a term used to refer to the economic political and social inequalities that exist between men and women.  There are a number of studies that look attempt to measure the international gender gap on a country-to-country basis.   The United Nations Development Program puts out an annual report, which looks at gender inequality through three dimensions, reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation.  Reproductive health looks at maternal mortality ratio and adolescent fertility rate.  A state with good reproductive standards will have low values for both measures. Empowerment looks at the political and educational attainment of men and women through the percentage of women in parliament and percentage of women with secondary and above education. The final measure in the GII is labor market participation.  For this dimension the GII looks at women getting paid work, working without pay and women looking for work.  Another commonly referenced report on the global gender inequality is the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report.  The WEF report looks at many of the same measures as well as many additional variables including salaries, gaps in life expectancy.  Much of the data from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap comes from data collected by ECOSOC bodies such as the ILO, WHO, and UNDP.

**Financial Crisis’s effect on the Gender Gap**

The first and most obvious way that gender equality is affected by the financial crisis is through labor market participation.  Firstly in many developing countries export manufacturing is a major part of the economy in many of these countries this sector of the economy has large employment of women. Export manufacturing is a sector of the economy that is also very susceptible to economic shocks.   As such this means that women in developing countries were hurt much harder than men in developing with regards to increases in unemployment.  Women may also be more likely to be fired when compared to their male counterparts.  A global survey in 2005 showed that 40% of employers felt that men had more of a right to a job than women.  Furthermore during the Asian Financial Crisis of the late nineties women were 7 times more likely to lose their jobs than men.

Women also are employed at higher rates in the informal sector.   Jobs in the informal sector range from selling goods without a license to housework to prostitution.  Jobs in the informal sector of the economy are generally hazardous for ones health, low paying and lack social safety nets formal sector jobs might have.  With the economic downturn many women have had to start working in the informal sector in order to make up for loss in household income from the male counterpart of because of loss of their formal sector job.

Women also face a tougher burden when unemployed.  Women on average have lower paying jobs than men and will not have as much money saved up that will help them go get through unemployment. Also by not participating in the labor market these women’s abilities to provide for children and their household are greatly diminished along with some of the social benefits that come along with employment such as having a greater voice in the local community.

Labor market participation is not the only way that gender equality is affected by economic downturns.  In Uganda it was found that when household income declined girls enrollment in school dropped whereas boys enrollment seemed sheltered from these shocks.  This represents a serious setback for gender equality as many of these girls will be unable to return to school and educational attainment is widely recognized to be one of the most important factors in providing gender equality

Women health is also negatively affected by the economic downturn.  In Africa over 50% of public health spending comes from commitments by other countries to fight AIDS.  During and economic crisis countries prioritize foreign aid in the form AIDS commitments very lowly and as a result theses expenditures are some of the first ones that get cut.

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**Topic II: Pursuing Socially and Economically**

**Sustainable Practices in Mineral Trade**

**Introduction to the Mineral Trade**

When discussing the mineral trade it is important to first understand that there is no internationally agreed upon term for what constitutes mineral resources.  One definition is any solid resource that has to be mined from the earth this includes such energy resources such as coal and uranium.  In some discussion s on the mineral trade these energy resources are left out due to their unique economic nature and because of engineers in the mining field tend to be trained differently depending on whether they are dealing with energy or non energy resources.  Furthermore trade publication in mining often makes a technical distinction   between metal and nonmetal minerals.  The variance in definitions as to what constitutes the mineral trade.

The Mineral trade has been a fast growing and lucrative industry in recent years.  Most modern electronics require rare earth minerals in their manufacturing and the international demand.  Over the past 20 year mining has shifted away from Europe and North America and into Africa, China, South East Asia, and Latin America making issues in the mining industry increasingly more important on an international level.  

**Economic Harms of the Mineral Trade**

Conventional economic theory would state that countries with a wealth in resources would be well off from an economic perspective.  However this is far from the case.  Resource rich countries often face a number of economic issues.

The first economic issue that mineral rich countries face is Dutch Disease.  Dutch Disease is an economic phenomenon that arises from an over exploitation of natural resources and a subsequent decline in the manufacturing and agricultural sector.  This overexploitation of natural resources will cause a “resource movement effect” where in the increase in demand for labor in the sectors of the economy related to the extraction of a natural resource causes direct-industrialization where in the shift in a country's labor resources damage the manufacturing sector of an economy.  This leaves a country unprepared to continue development after the resource has run out.  Another aspect of Dutch Disease occurs with exchange rates, which harms industries not related to the resource being extracted.  The export of natural resource causes an increase in demand for the currency of the country doing the exporting.  This currency appreciation makes it harder for other industries to function, as it is now more expensive for other countries to buy goods from those industries.

Countries who rely on natural resources also have highly volatile economies, which can be severely hurt by fluctuations in the international price for that resource.  This makes long term economic planning incredibly hard to manage.  A sudden change in economic conditions for the worse are not only likely but can force a country into curtailing social programs and breaking government contracts.

**Social and Political Harms**

The Discovery of a natural resource in a country often has the effect of worsening social issues such as government corruption and ethnic conflict as parties try to fight for control of a resource and the money that goes with it. Studies have shown that countries where commodity exports make up close to 25% of GDP have a 33% risk of conflict but when exports are closer to 5% then the chance of conflict drops down to 6%

Resources found in conflict zones are named Conflict resources.  Issues involving conflict resources have long been an issue various UN bodies have worked to deal with.  Perhaps the best-known conflict resource is “blood diamonds” commonly found in Sierra Leone and Angola.   Rebel groups in these countries harvest these mineral resources as a form of income in order to fund their operations.  While international regulation has worked in mitigating the effect of blood diamonds many other minerals are being used to fund rebel forces in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo where gold, cobalt, tungsten and other rare earth minerals are being illegally sold as a way to fund rebel groups in the east of the country.

Countries relying on natural resources also tend to be more corrupt.   This is because certain aspects of government, such as institutions that help create a productive economy outside of the resource industry can be largely ignored.  Also the inflow of money from the selling of these resources can be used to pay off certain important factions in a country meaning officials can ignore large parts of the population in favor of preferred benefactors.  Furthermore officials in resource rich countries many times prefer to pocket money coming in from these resources for their own personal gain rather than spend them on their own infrastructure.

The mining of resources also can include numerous illegal actions.  It is not uncommon to find mining corporations that work outside of the law.  There are two majors areas where mining companies infringe upon international and domestic laws.  In many of the rules put into place to mitigate the environmental damages caused by mining.  Many of these rules mean increased costs incurred by the company which affects their profits.  Mining companies are able to get away with this because they of corruption in the central government that has politicians benefiting from the mining industries profits.

**Environmental Impacts of Mining**

Mining has countless environmental damages.  Many of these environmental impacts depend greatly on what is being mined, how it is being mined and where it is being mined there are certain common environmental impacts that are present in a majority of mining operations.

The first and most common environmental impact of mining is water pollution.  water can be polluted either through chemical byproducts of the mining process seeping into groundwater or by runoff from the mining process running into lakes and rivers.  In both cases there can be serious health issues as a result of contamination.  Contamination in the water supply can cause arsenic, sulfuric acid, and Mercury to get into drinking water.  These chemicals can also severely damage vegetation and cause harm to wildlife and livestock.

Water pollution can be mitigated with proper governmental oversight.  Some countries such as the United States have implemented laws requiring mining companies to mitigate the impacts of there mining by properly disposing of waste by either burying in in the mine after mining is done (although this still causes some environmental impacts albeit very small.  Companies can also use Bioleaching, which uses living organisms to extract metals from their ores.  If contamination has occurred companies can use acid mining drainage to try to return a contaminated area back to its pre-contaminated state.

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