

### Topic A: Promoting Urban Public Spaces and Protecting Their Use for Political Expression

#### Introduction

The lived experience of the world's population is increasingly urban. Currently, 55% of all people live in cities. Without proper planning and managed growth, cities can become dangerous, unhygienic, and stressful places to live. Having adequate public space – such as parks, squares, and public markets – can mitigate these effects. These spaces are publicly owned, useable and accessible by the public, and enjoyable to all without a profit motive.<sup>1</sup> Public spaces are important for urban resident health and well-being, social inclusion, economic exchange, and political expression.<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat states that public spaces should ideally make up around 50% of urban land area – yet few cities meet this target.<sup>3</sup> The socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological benefits of public spaces are summarized in Figure 1.<sup>4</sup>

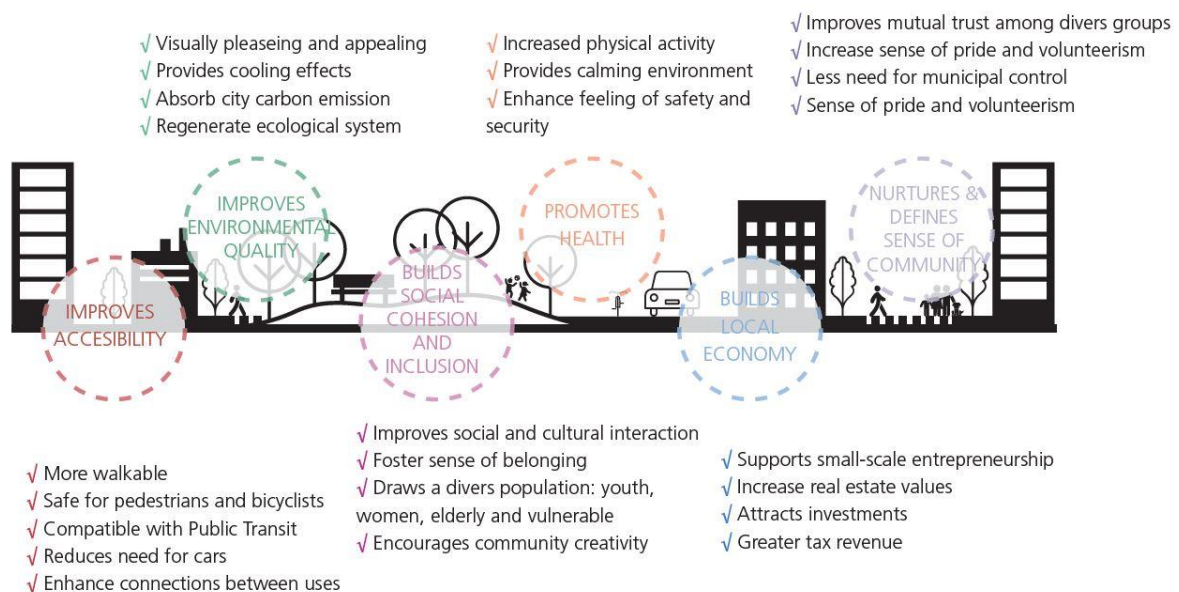


Figure 1. *Benefits of public spaces to Cities*

Beyond these benefits, public spaces also have an important role in government accountability and transparency. It would be hard to imagine an “Arab Spring” without mention of Tahrir Square in Cairo, or of “Occupy Wall Street” without mention of Zuccotti Park (Figure 2). Public assemblies in these spaces can call attention to civic problems and protest government policies. These in turn provide an important release-valve for marginalized or minority groups and require governments to acknowledge and address the concerns of the populace.<sup>5</sup> Yet, very few cities view these uses as priorities, and some have gone out of their way to design – or re-design – public spaces specifically to curtail peaceful assembly and protest.<sup>6</sup> The world's increasingly urban citizenry must be guaranteed access to adequate public spaces both to better their lived experience and to exercise their political rights to assemble and protest peacefully.

**Figure 2: Public Spaces as Spaces of Protest**



Tahrir Square, Cairo, 2011  
*Source: AP News*



Zucotti Park, New York, 2011  
*Source: Philadelphia Inquirer*

### Current Situation

Through its various institutions, the United Nations has prioritized both the absolute growth in safe public spaces and the guaranteed access of those spaces for peaceable assembly and protest. On the former, the relevant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is 11, specifically target 11.7 to “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces” by 2030.<sup>7</sup> An indicator of success will be the proportion of built-up area that is open public space of use to all.<sup>8</sup> To this end, the United Nations has worked primarily through the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). In 2012, UN-Habitat launched the Global Public Space Programme, (GPSP) designed to promote “green and quality public spaces in cities, acting as an enabler for social justice, prosperity, and environmental change.”<sup>9</sup> The GPSP has developed a number of innovative strategies to help governments strategize where and how to provision public space as well as empowering citizens to engage in the design and implementation work.<sup>10</sup> While the work has resulted in the creation of over 137 public spaces in 90 cities,<sup>11</sup> increases in public space is still at risk from rapid urbanization and commercial development.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, increasingly authoritarian tendencies in national governments have curtailed political rights in public spaces – claiming that even peaceful protests can be disruptive and dangerous. The political rights to assemble and peacefully demonstrate are guaranteed in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and subsequently by numerous UN treaties and declarations.<sup>13</sup> In 2016, the Human Rights Council made an explicit connection between public spaces and the rights to peaceful assembly, even though they may cause disruption:

“Gatherings are as legitimate a use of public space as commercial activities or vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Any use of public space requires some measure of coordination to protect different interests, but there are many legitimate ways in which citizens can use public spaces. A certain level of disruption to daily life due to gatherings, such as traffic disruption and disruption or even damage to commercial activities, must be tolerated so that the right is not deprived of its essence.”<sup>14</sup>

# Saint Peter's University High School Model United Nations

## **Third Committee: Social and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)**

---

Yet, many governments have developed a narrative that views protests in public spaces as a threat. Even where protests might be allowed in public spaces, governments can impede and intimidate demonstrators through outsized military or police presence and through filming and surveillance of participants.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that currently only 2% of the world's population can enjoy the rights to assemble and peacefully express dissent.<sup>16</sup> While it is important to increase the proportion of urban land area dedicated to public space, it is equally important to ensure that residents enjoy their full rights to use such spaces to peacefully assemble and protest.

### **Questions to Address**

- Are the measures taken by UN institutions currently enough to assure that 50% of all urban land is dedicated to public spaces?
- What are the major obstacles to increasing the number and accessibility of public spaces in cities?
- How can the United Nations consider peaceful assembly and protest rights in the programs it designs for increasing urban public spaces?

### **Topic B: Increasing Wealth and Access to Capital for Women**

#### **Introduction**

Economic empowerment of women is an important component of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – not only in fostering gender equality, but in helping economies meet their development targets. In Goal 1, the UN seeks to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.”<sup>17</sup> Goal 5 aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, Goal 8 promotes “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”<sup>19</sup> These goals and the relevant targets are detailed in Figure 3. Increasing access of women to capital investment to start businesses through grants, loans and other programs can help them lift themselves and their family out of poverty.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the economic activity generated by the increasing wealth of women – through consumption and further investment – can help lift a country’s economy as a whole.<sup>21</sup> In fact, studies show that over \$160 trillion in wealth is lost globally due to the earnings gap between men and women.<sup>22</sup> Gender inequality has real impacts on development and decreasing that inequality can help increase economic growth – as gender quality is highly correlated with growth in GDP. (Figure 4.)<sup>23</sup>

The creation and retention of wealth requires access to capital – the means through which goods and services are produced. Human capital encompasses the education and skills that allow women to compete in the labor market and successfully run businesses. Financial capital is the investment necessary to buy the tools, land, or machinery necessary to start or expand a business. As women invest in themselves and their businesses, they create assets – the value of which represents their wealth. A crucial component of individual wealth creation is right to own

# Saint Peter's University High School Model United Nations

## Third Committee: Social and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)

---

property. Without enforceable property rights, women can lose control of their businesses or farms to male family members.<sup>24</sup> Further, unless women own their own property, they can have difficulty providing collateral to obtain loans needed to start or grow their business.<sup>25</sup>

### Figure 3: SDGs Relating to the Economic Empowerment of Women

#### Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

**Target 1.4:** By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

**Target 1.b:** Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions

#### Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

**Target 5.a:** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

#### Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

**Target 8.3:** Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

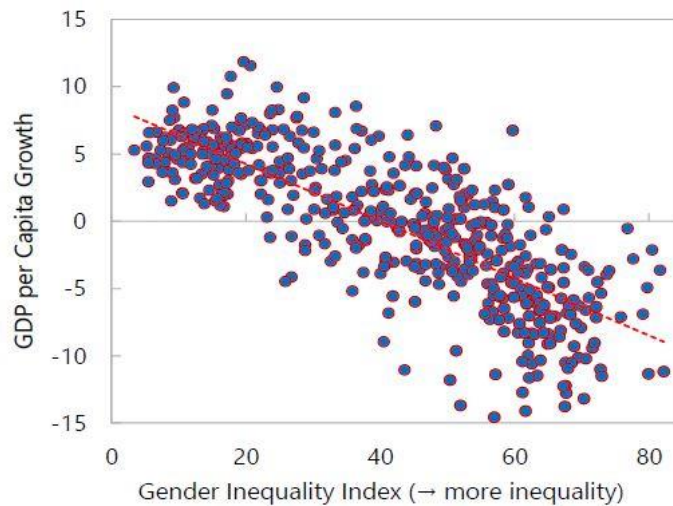
### Current Situation

The obstacles to the full participation of women in the economy are daunting – particularly in less developed economies. Women are less likely than men to work in the formal economy and more likely to rely on side-businesses to supplement family income.<sup>26</sup> Social norms often inhibit the ability of women to have their own bank accounts or register property in their name.<sup>27</sup> Without proof of these assets, women have a harder time securing financing to improve their farms or businesses.<sup>28</sup> Poorer women tend to be rooted in the countryside – often due to caregiver responsibilities – and so have less access to financial services in cities.<sup>29</sup> This has led to a "credit gap" where women owned micro, small, and medium-sized businesses are estimated to be underfunded by \$1.7 trillion.<sup>30</sup> Closing this credit gap would lead to an average 12% increase in annual incomes for women by 2030.<sup>31</sup> There is also a significant digital divide, with women less likely to own mobile phones or have access to the internet.<sup>32</sup> The gender-based barrier to women's economic empowerment are summarized in Figure 5.<sup>33</sup>



**Third Committee: Social and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)**

**Figure 4**  
**Correlation Between Gender Inequality and Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per Capita Growth**



Source: Gonzales and others (2015a).

Note: GDP per capita growth derived based on a regression of real GDP per capita growth on GDP per capita, to make rates comparable across levels of development.

**Figure 5**  
**Gender-Based Barriers to Financial Inclusion**

| Demand Side Barriers  | Supply Side Barriers  | Legal & Regulatory Barriers   |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of bargaining power within the household   | Inappropriate product offerings   | Account opening requirements that disadvantage women                  |
| Concentration in lower-paying economic activities                                       | Lack of gender-specific policies and practices for product design and marketing | Barriers to obtaining formal identification                           |
| Competing demands on women's time related to unpaid domestic work                       | Inappropriate distribution channels   | Legal barriers to owning and inheriting property and other collateral |
| Lack of assets for collateral   |   | Lack of gender-inclusive credit reporting systems                     |
| Lack of formal identification   |   |   |
| Reduced mobility due to time constraints or social norms                                |   |   |
| Lower rates of cell phone ownership among women, needed to access many digital products |   |   |

Source: Innovations for Poverty Actions

## Third Committee: Social and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)

---

One strategy that has been popular for the past several decades has been micro-lending – offering small loans to women entrepreneurs to help them start businesses and build credit.<sup>34</sup> While such programs have been successful, micro-credit programs, are not enough to bridge these gaps.<sup>35</sup> Solutions need to be scaled-up and integrated with development aid and changes in national policies.<sup>36</sup> Yet, only 5% of current bilateral development aid prioritizes gender equity in program requirements.<sup>37</sup> National governments and financial institutions also need to do more.<sup>38</sup> The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has begun to encourage greater access to financing for women entrepreneurs.<sup>39</sup> The World Bank has called on governments to incentivize financial institutions to create lending strategies that better serve women.<sup>40</sup> As UN Women declared, the global development apparatus must begin looking at business financing through a “gender lens” that considers gender factors in investment decisions.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, current studies indicate that both rich and poor countries will fail to meet their gender equity targets by 2030.<sup>42</sup> Clearly more must be done.

### Questions to Address

- What should member states do to remove barriers to capital and wealth creation for women?
- How can the United Nations promote women’s economic empowerment within existing development programs and bilateral aid deals?
- What steps can be taken to persuade financial institutions to develop products that take a “gender lens” approach to lending and investment?

---

<sup>1</sup> *National Urban Policies Driving Public Space Led Urban Development: A Quick Thematic Guide for Mainstreaming Safe, Inclusive and Accessible Public Spaces into National Urban Policies*. UN-Habitat: Nairobi, Kenya. 2020, p. 12

<sup>2</sup> “Public Space.” UN-Habitat. <https://unhabitat.org/topic/public-space>, Accessed 7 December 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *National Urban Policies Driving Public Space Led Urban Development*, p. 12

<sup>5</sup> Kowalewski, Maciej and Marek Ostrowski. Protests in urban environments: review and research agenda. *Miscellanea Geographica – Regional Studies on Development*, Vol. 28 • No. 3 • 2024 • pp. 127-131

<sup>6</sup> Schwartzstein, Peter. Kowalewski, How Urban Design Can Make or Break Protests, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/geography-protest-how-urban-design-can-make-or-break-people-power-180975189/>, Accessed 7 December 2024.

<sup>7</sup> “Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11#targets\\_and\\_indicators](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11#targets_and_indicators), Accessed 7 December 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Global Public Space Programme: Annual Report 2021*, UN-Habitat: Nairobi, Kenya, 2022, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-9

<sup>11</sup> “Public Space”

<sup>12</sup> *Global Public Space Programme*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Voule, Clement Nyaletsossi, *Preserving the gains and pushing back against the global attack on civic space and growing authoritarianism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association*, United Nations Human Rights Council, 21 June 2024, A/HRC/56/50

# Saint Peter's University High School Model United Nations

## Third Committee: Social and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)

---

<sup>14</sup> Sapienza, Emanuele, Gloria Manzotti, and Luqman Patel, *Protests, human rights and conflict prevention: Proposals to rethink the models of state response to social mobilization*, United Nations Development Program: New York, 2023. p. 27

<sup>15</sup> Sapienza, pp. 18-20

<sup>16</sup> Voule, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> "Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>18</sup> "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>19</sup> "Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>20</sup> "Facts and figures: Economic empowerment", UN Women, February 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Globally, Countries Lose \$160 Trillion in Wealth Due to Earnings Gaps Between Women and Men", World Bank Group, 30 May 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/05/30/globally-countries-lose-160-trillion-in-wealth-due-to-earnings-gaps-between-women-and-men>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>23</sup> *Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment*, International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC, 30 May 2018, p. 5

<sup>24</sup> *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-25*, United Nations Capital Development Fund, New York, 2023, p. 12

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Facts and figures: Economic empowerment"

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Wodon, Quentin and Benedicte de la Briere, *Unrealized Potential: The High Cost of Gender Inequality in Earnings*, The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2018, p. 17

<sup>29</sup> Miolene, Elissa, "How can we close the \$160 trillion women's wealth gap?", Devex, 18 April 2024, <https://www.devex.com/news/how-can-we-close-the-160-trillion-women-s-wealth-gap-107497>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>30</sup> "5 ways to accelerate women's economic empowerment", UN News, 7 March 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147357>, Accessed 14 January 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *Reaching financial equality for women: A 10-point action plan for governments, companies, and international organizations to help end women's economic exclusion*, The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2023, p. 20

<sup>33</sup> Holloway, Kyle et al., *Women's Economic Empowerment Through Financial Inclusion: A Review of Existing Evidence and Remaining Knowledge Gaps*, Innovations for Poverty Action, March 2017, p. 4

<sup>34</sup> Wodon, p. 17

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Empowering Women, Building Sustainable Assets*, UN Women, New York, January 2024, p. iv

<sup>37</sup> *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-25*, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> *Reaching financial equality for women*, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-25*, p.24.

<sup>40</sup> *Reaching financial equality for women*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Empowering Women, Building Sustainable Assets*, p. 47

<sup>42</sup> *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-25*, p. 5.