



## Chilling Fact: U.S. Ranks Low In Women's Empowerment

by Mary Elizabeth Murphy  
Managing Director, S.T.A.R. Resources

It's Sunday morning and I'm relaxing with my coffee and my paper. I come across a piece that catches my attention, "Cold Climate Favors Women". Being originally from Chicago and moving rapidly through my 40s, I decided to read further. Could this be yet another clue on how to look younger? Perhaps it's a health report. What could they mean by "Cold Climate Favors Women"? Maybe it has to do with fashion.

Much to my surprise ... the leading question reads, "How well do countries utilize the talents of their female citizens?" *The World Economic Forum ranked 58 nations according to their "gender gaps" - based on job opportunities, pay, political representation, healthcare and education to females.*

I had to read on ... I was certain that we, the United States of America, home of the free, land of the brave, the global model of liberty and justice for all, had to rank No. 1. Even with pay inequity, childcare and health-care concerns for women, recent Title IX problems and being under-represented in politics, I was certain we were the country that knew best how to utilize the talents of its female citizens. I had no doubt I would see that we ranked first.

Imagine my surprise when Sweden was in fact the place to live if you are a woman. Surely we are ranked No. 2. Wrong again. Next in the rankings is Norway, and then Iceland. I was beginning to feel a chill.

How about the Top 10? We must be there, right? After all, Laura Bush just said in her remarks at the World Economic Forum: "*Freedom, especially freedom for women, is more than the absence of oppression.*"

We were 17th. Egypt came in last at 58. My blood ran cold.

I had to know more. What exactly was this report all about? I needed a deeper explanation of this survey. How did we fare in each of these categories as compared to all 58 countries?

I did my Google search and found the World Economic Forum Website [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org). The study uses a large number of hard data indicators from international organizations as well as qualitative information from the Forum's own Executive Opinion Survey. The study measures the extent to which women have been able to achieve full equality in a number of critical areas.

The following is taken directly from "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap" report by Augusto Lopez-Claros and Saadia Zahidi:

***The Economic Participation of Women*** - their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms - is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries a whole. **The United States ranked 19th.**

***Economic Opportunity*** concerns the quality of women's economic involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers. This is a particularly serious problem in developed countries where women may gain employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either concentrated in poorly paid or unskilled job "ghettos," characterized by the absence of upward mobility and opportunity. **The United States-46th.**

***Political Empowerment*** refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. **The United States-19th.**

***Educational Attainment*** is without a doubt, the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence. **The United States-8th.**

***Health and Well-Being*** is a concept related to the substantial difference between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. **The United States-42nd.**

"Countries that do not fully capitalize on one-half of their human resources are clearly undermining their competitive potential." Augusto Lopez-Claros

©2005, S.T.A.R. Resources