

Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development: An Over View

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Abstract

Gender equality is a right. Fulfilling this right is the best chance we have in meeting some of the most pressing challenges of our time—from economic crisis and lack of health care, to climate change, violence against women and escalating conflicts. Women are not only more affected by these problems, but also possess ideas and leadership to solve them. The gender discrimination still holding too many women back, holds our world back too. Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full Participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”. There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between Women and men - equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities – is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes”

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Introduction

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”

Kofi Annan

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015, embody a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.

This editorial package showcases UN Women’s 2018 flagship report, “Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda.” It features data,

stories, videos and publications that illustrate how and why gender equality matters across all the Sustainable Development Goals, and how the goals affect the real lives of women and girls everywhere.

Women, who make up half of the world's population, have benefited more than men from the progress in economic and social development in the last three decades. Nevertheless they continue to be overrepresented among the world's most vulnerable groups, as access to resources and power remains highly skewed towards men. Gender equality is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. By providing the same opportunities to women and men, including in decision-making in all kinds of activities, a sustainable path of development can be achieved to ensure that women's and men's interests are both taken into account in the allocation of resources. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made important provisions for the recognition of women's contributions and their full participation in sustainable development. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (quoted at the outset of this paper) and "Global Action for Women towards

Sustainable and Equitable Development" of Agenda 21 make commitments to strengthening the position of women.

The concept of empowerment

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important". Women's empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. This entails the idea of women's continued disadvantage compared to men which is apparent in different economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. Therefore, women's empowerment can also be seen as an important process in reaching gender equality, which is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female". According to the UN Population Fund, an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth. She can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and she has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally. Gender role expectations are institutionalized through legislative, educational, political and economic systems. Women need to be "empowered" in order to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field between women and men before gender equality can be reached and maintained.

The concept of sustainable development

Sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It therefore encapsulates the needs of both women and men. Intra-generational equity cannot be achieved without addressing the gender relations which underlie prevailing inequity. Nor can inter-generational equity be obtained, or

responsibility to pass on a more equitable world to future generations be met, if inequalities continue to be perpetuated. Gender disparity is among the most pervasive form of inequality in the world and without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved. In the late 1980s the report *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development defined the concept “sustainable development” as development which “meets the needs of the present without

Compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. While aiming to maximize the well-being of today’s generation, it is important to take a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences of our actions for our children, their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the resources they will require for their own well-being are not depleted, and that the natural environment into which they will be born will not be polluted or destroyed.

Sustainable development is conceptualized as resting on three inter-related pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. A fourth pillar – the preservation of cultural diversity has been proposed. This conceptual categorization might lead to treating these areas in isolation without accounting for a whole range of channels through which these pillars reinforce each other and bring about sustainable development. Instead, by taking an integrated and holistic approach to socio-culturally responsible, environmentally-friendly economic development, sustainable development can be revealed as a multifaceted and dynamic process. It is important not to conceptualize women’s empowerment and gender equality as a question of social development alone, but as a cross-cutting issue in economic and socio-cultural development and environmental protection. Sustainable development has been defined by World Commission on Environment and Development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains two key Concepts:

- The concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social Organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

There are three core elements that need to be harmonised in order to achieve sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. Sustainable development aims at eradicating poverty through, in particular, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living and fostering equitable social development and inclusion.

Empowering women for sustainable development

Women’s empowerment is a process and Sustainable development encompasses socio-cultural, economic and environmental aspects and thus covers an enormously wide domain. So far gender issues have been primarily dealt with as a social issue. This is reflected in the areas of poverty reduction, education and health care in the Millennium Development Goals. UNDP coordinates global and national efforts to integrate gender equality and women’s Empowerment into poverty

reduction, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and environment and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. UNDP focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment not only as human rights, but also because they are a pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable Development.

These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large.

The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet. “Supporting the 2030 Agenda is a top priority for UNDP,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. “The SDGs provide us with a common plan and agenda to tackle some of the pressing challenges facing our world such as poverty, climate change and conflict. UNDP has the experience and expertise to drive progress and help support countries on the path to sustainable development.

Conclusion:

In the end it could be concluded that, Economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns need to be approached in an integrated and holistic manner. From a gender perspective, it is particularly important not to consider gender equality as a socio-cultural issue alone but to give it due consideration in the economic and environmental realms as well – treating gender equality as a cross-cutting objective to attain sustainable development.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades: More girls are going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership, and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality “We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored.” Sheryl Sandberg .

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