

# GENDER INEQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** According to the most quoted definition of sustainable development it can be defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In fact sustainable development refers to a development process which enhances peoples' capacity to create and consume wealth on a lasting basis.

Sustainable development requires, among other things, a socio-economic, and environment conditions which enables men and women to engage in and sustain the development process. The social relationships between individuals and communities can either promote or constrain sustainable development.

The three dimensions of gender equality and sustainable development which will be discussed in this paper are: (a) Gender and economic dimension of sustainable development, (b) Gender and social dimension of sustainable development, (c) Gender and environmental dimension of sustainable development,

These dimensions have equal and interrelated importance. The paper will explain that stressing the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development in the absence of economics neglects the financial capital needed to pay for progress. Building up the economic and social aspects of sustainability while neglecting the environment degrades the natural capital needed for growth. Focusing on economics and the environment without attention to social factors may lead to growth but just for a few and not for all society. In the paper we refer to some studies indicate that gender inequalities are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world.

The present paper tries to provide a critical perspective on the current sustainable development paradigm and tries to integrate a human rights approach too. In the Beijing Platform for Action, governments agreed that Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development. While UN member states acknowledged at the Rio+20 Conference, that “gender equality and effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development”.

Finally the paper conclude that sustainable development is a multidimensional process . It encompasses economic, social, political, cultural and environmental dimension's. In this paper we will explain the aforementioned dimensions in detail and the importance of gender issues and gender equality in sustainable development will be discussed.

Finally based on findings of the paper, some recommendations for promoting gender equality will be presented.

**Keywords:** Environment, Gender Inequality, Human rights, Socio economic, Sustainable Development,

## INTRODUCTION

According to the most quoted definition of sustainable development it can be defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>1</sup> In fact sustainable development refers to a development process which enhances peoples' capacity to create and consume wealth on a lasting basis.

Gender equality is a broad concept and refer to it as “a situation in which both women and men are granted equal opportunities to develop their personal abilities and to make choices without being constrained by gender roles and stereotypes. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their behaviour and aspirations are equally valued and that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on their gender”.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper tries to provide a critical perspective on the current development paradigm and tries to integrate a human rights approach across all subject areas. This is also done by wherever applicable referencing important UN human rights conventions and resolutions, on which the world community could build when devising possible pathways to sustainable development

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Women’s experiences of development in different parts of the world are different. women from a number of countries have chances to work hard to promote sustainable development in their communities but women in some other countries do not have opportunities or possibilities to officially involve in sustainable development process. Generally speaking, there have been a number of improvements to women’s lives in the past twenty years. For example, female life expectancy is increasing; more girls are going to school; more women are in the paid workforce; and, many countries have introduced laws to protect women’s rights. However, the gender divide remains. There has been “no breakthrough in women’s participation in decision-making processes and little progress in legislation in favor of women’s rights to own land and other property”,

### *Some Theoretical Aspects of Gender Analysis*

Gender Analysis is a valuable descriptive and diagnostic tool for examining the differences between the roles that women and men play, the different levels of power they hold, their differing needs, constraints and opportunities, and the impact of these differences on their lives. The two main goals of Gender Analysis are: to better understand our communities and to promote gender equality through our work.

Gender analysis explains the relationships of women and men in society, and the inequalities in those relationships, and tries to answer questions such as: Who does what? Who has what? Who decides? How? Who gains? Who loses? Which men? Which women? Gender analysis breaks down the divide between the private sphere (involving personal relationships) and the public sphere (which deals with relationships in wider society). It looks at how power relations within the household interrelate with those at the international, state, market, and community level. Gender and development work is based on gender analysis. This involves promoting equality between men and women; key to this is placing the issues that women say are of particular concern to them on the main agenda of those institutions which shape women's and men's lives (the state, non-government organisations, and so on).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Brundtland Report (1987)

<sup>2</sup> The Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies (ICFG), (2013), *Glossary on Sustainable Development and Gender Equality*, University of Bern, Switzerland. PP 7-8  
[http://www.wecf.eu/english/articles/2013/05/glossary\\_sus\\_dev\\_gender.php](http://www.wecf.eu/english/articles/2013/05/glossary_sus_dev_gender.php)

<sup>3</sup> Candida M. Ines S. and M. Mukhopadhyay (1999) *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks* an Oxfam Publication [https://www.ndi.org/files/Guide to Gender Analysis Frameworks.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/Guide%20to%20Gender%20Analysis%20Frameworks.pdf)

In all societies, men and women are assigned tasks, activities and responsibilities according to their sex. The gender division of labour varies from one society and culture to another, and within each culture, it also changes with external circumstances and over time. Because in most societies, gender power relations are skewed in favour of men, different values are ascribed to men's tasks and women's tasks. In other words Gender Division of Labor is the result of how each society divides work among men and among women according to what is considered suitable or appropriate to each gender<sup>4</sup>

According to the report of the World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality Development and Peace in July 1985 in Nairobi "Equality is both a goal and a means whereby individuals are accorded equal Treatment under the law and equal opportunities to enjoy their rights and to develop their potential talents and skills so that they can participate in national political, economic, social and cultural development and can benefit from its results. For women in particular, equality means the realization of rights that have been denied as a result of cultural, institutional, behavioral and attitudinal discrimination."<sup>5</sup>

The act for promoting equality between men and women has provided the legal framework to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex in a number of areas such as employment, education and vocational guidance, discriminatory advertising for employment and sexual harassment at the workplace among others. To provide equality among men and women all sectors of society have a role to play to improve the quality of life in three key areas, namely (a) economic growth and equity, (b) social development and (c) conserving natural resources and the environment. Their balance cannot be achieved without solving the prevailing problems of gender inequality and inequity

#### ***Gender equality and Economic Dimension of Sustainable Development***

One of the most famous definition of sustainable development is the one published by Brandtland Report 1987 as a kind of "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>6</sup> It means a better quality of life for everyone (men and Women) now and for future generations to come.

Elliott, J. A.(2009) defined sustainable development as "The process of improving the living conditions of the poorer majority of mankind while avoiding the destruction of natural and living resources, so that increases of production and improvements in living conditions can be sustained in the longer term"<sup>7</sup>. Acknowledging the importance of gender equality and economic dimension of sustainable development can be seen in almost all definition of sustainable development, although there are varied interactions between different dimensions of sustainable development. Sustainable development is still often seen primarily as environmental sustainability. In the context of economic dimension of sustainable development more often look at the world of work, in this regard, equality between women and men includes the following elements:

1. Equality of opportunity and treatment in employment
2. Equal remuneration for work of equal value
3. Equal access to safe and healthy working environments and to social security
4. Equality in association and collective bargaining
5. Equality in obtaining meaningful career development
6. A balance between work and home life that is fair to both women and men
7. Equal participation in decision-making at all levels

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, Baseline definitions of key concepts [portal.unesco.org/en/files/.../10649049699Definitions.doc/Definitions.do](http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/.../10649049699Definitions.doc/Definitions.do)

<sup>5</sup> UN (1985), United Nations Decade for Women: Equality Development and Peace, (Paragraph 11)

<sup>6</sup> The Brundtland Report (1987)

<sup>7</sup> Elliott, J. A.(2009) *Sustainable Development* University of Brighton, Brighton, UK  
<http://eprints.brighton.ac.uk/id/eprint/6226>

Given that women are usually in a disadvantaged position in the workplace compared to men, promotion of gender equality implies explicit attention to women's needs and perspectives. At the same time, there are also significant negative effects of unequal power relations and expectations on men and boys due to stereotyping about what it means to be a male. Instead, both women and men, and boys and girls, should be free to develop their abilities and make choices – without limitations set by rigid gender roles and prejudices – based on personal interests and capacities.

Based on WDR2012 gender equality matters, as an instrument for development. As WDR 2012 shows, gender equality is smart economics: it can enhance economic efficiency and improve other development outcomes in three ways:

First, removing barriers that prevent women from having the same access as men to education, economic opportunities, and productive inputs can generate broad productivity gains—gains all the more important in a more competitive and globalized world.

Second, improving women's absolute and relative status feeds many other development outcomes, including those for their children.

Third, leveling the playing field—where women and men have equal chances to become socially and politically active, make decisions, and shape policies—is likely to lead over time to more representative, and more inclusive, institutions and policy choices and thus to a better development path. (WDR 2012 p. 3 )

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that equalizing access to productive resources between female and male farmers could increase agricultural output in developing countries by as much as 2.5 to 4 percent.<sup>8</sup> Eliminating barriers that prevent women from working in certain occupations or sectors would have similar positive effects, reducing the productivity gap between male and female workers by one-third to one-half (chapter 5) and increasing output per worker by 3 to 25 percent across a range of countries.<sup>9</sup>

According to Stevens, Candice (2010) Investing in women and girls — in their education, health and gainful activities — can have a multiplier effect on poor economies. However, the share of bilateral and multilateral aid focused on gender-specific projects remains insufficient. Banks and donors need to see women as active players in economic development. More aid should be focused on increasing income-generating initiatives based on women's traditional roles in the home, health services, nutrition, and agriculture. Gender-sensitive development assistance can be a powerful force for empowering women to compete in land, labor and product markets enabling them to make economic, social and environmental contributions to sustainable development.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Gender equality and Social Dimension of Sustainable Development***

In the Beijing Platform for Action, governments agreed that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is also a condition for people-centered sustainable development. While UN member states acknowledged at the Rio+20 Conference, that “We underscore that women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. We recognize the leadership role of women and we resolve to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to ensure their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programs and decision-making at all levels.”<sup>11</sup> Development affects people in different parts of the world in different ways. It also affects people differently, depending whether they are male or female. Being aware of this, and taking it into account in development planning and action is known today as practicing a ‘gender perspective’.

Raising awareness of the benefits of gender equality is a key priority in development process. The task of promoting equality between men and women is not an easy one. It requires a change in mentality and practical and innovative approaches to bring about real equality. Each country and the whole world will be all the richer if women

<sup>8</sup> FAO, IFAD, and ILO 2010. Cited in WDR 2012 P 5

<sup>9</sup> Cuberes and Teignier Baqué 2011; Hurst and others 2011 Cited in WDR 2012 P 5

<sup>10</sup> Stevens, Candice (2010), Are the Women Key to Sustainable Development, *Sustainable Development Insight*, No 3, p 4

[www.un.org/esa/dsd](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd)

<sup>11</sup> The Future We Want, section 45

contribute together with men in making full use of their potential in the economic, social, cultural and environmental spheres.

The role of women as a factor of development is in many ways linked to their involvement in various forms of social activities, levels of decision-making, management and social structures, such as worker participation in management, worker self-employed and co-operatives. The development of these forms of participation, which have an impact on the development and promotion of working and living conditions, and the inclusion of women in these forms of participation, equal with men is of crucial importance.

The role of women in sustainable development is related to the goal of comprehensive social and economic development and is fundamental to the progress of all societies. Sustainable development, includes development in the political, economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of human life, as well as the development of the economic and other material resources and the physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of human beings. Development should be conducive to providing women, particularly poor women, with the necessary means for increasingly claiming, achieving, enjoying and utilizing equality of opportunity. More directly, the increasingly successful participation of each woman in societal activities as a legally independent agent will contribute to further recognition in practice of her right to equality.<sup>12</sup>

The social pillar of sustainable development — and its emphasis on equity and equality — is the most politically-sensitive of the three dimensions and thus the hardest to address. Actually, It is very difficult to differentiate between economic and social aspects of gender inequality

According to Stevens, Candice (2010), The social pillar of sustainable Development involves confronting negative social trends such as growing income disparities, rising unemployment, and a persistent gender gap. In response to the economic crisis, many countries are implementing strategies for green growth, green economies and green jobs. But if they ignore basic social requirements such as income equity, job quality and gender equality, these initiatives will fail to be fully sustainable.<sup>13</sup>

Based on the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, which compares how countries divide their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations. This Index shows a correlation between gender equality and wealth per capita which cuts two ways: while economic progress can improve the status of women, a country cannot advance if its women are left behind. As might be expected, the highest gender scores are in Iceland and Finland and the lowest in Chad and Yemen<sup>14</sup>

### ***Gender equality and Ecological Dimension of Sustainable Development***

Women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management. Poverty and environmental degradation are closely interrelated. While poverty results in certain kinds of environmental stress, the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances.

R Shailaja (2000) argue that, energy is the most important indicator of sustainable development. Hence the key to sustainable development lies substantially in designing energy strategies. Nearly half the world's population depend on biomass for their energy needs and 75% of India's households use biofuel for cooking. Nearly 80% of India's domestic energy needs are derived from biomass. Of the 74% of the total population that lives in rural areas, women constitute nearly 50%. Rural women play a major role in biomass management. Shailaja in this paper focuses on the role of Indian rural women in biomass management, for the reason that they are directly involved in the production and protection of biomass energy, the major rural energy resource which plays a critical role in attaining the goals of sustainable development.

<sup>12</sup> *The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, 1985*, (Paragraph 12 and 117)

<sup>13</sup> Stevens, Candice (2010), Are the Women Key to Sustainable Development, *Sustainable Development Insight*, No 3, p 4

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 5 [www.un.org/esa/dsd](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd)

Through their management and use of natural resources, women provide sustenance to their families and communities. As consumers and producers, caretakers of their families and educators, women play an important role in promoting sustainable development through their concern for the quality and sustainability of life for present and future generations. Governments have expressed their commitment to creating a new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations.<sup>15</sup>

### Some Fact and Figures about woman's work

From 1980 to 2008, 552 million women joined the labour force. Four out of 10 workers globally are women<sup>16</sup>. In the majority of countries, women's wages represent between 70 and 90 per cent of men's, with even lower ratios in some Asian and Latin American countries<sup>17</sup>.

As of 2011, The share of women in vulnerable employment (50.5 per cent) exceeds the corresponding share for men (48.2 per cent). Women are far more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment in North Africa (55 per cent versus 32 per cent), the Middle East (42 per cent versus 27 per cent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 85 per cent versus 70 per cent).<sup>18 19</sup>

Women face a particularly difficult labour market situation. The ratio of female to male unemployment rates in most regions exceeds 1.0, but in the Middle East the regional ratio was as high as 2.3 in 2011. Such an elevated ratio is only matched by that in North Africa. The large discrepancy between male and female labour market indicators is not just limited to unemployment rates. Indeed, women's participation in the labour force is projected at a mere 18.4 per cent in 2011, the lowest such aggregate rate in the world, compared with 74 per cent for men. The compounding of cultural, social and economic gender divisions represents a substantial loss of economic potential in the Middle East. One global survey of companies found that only 18.3 per cent had a top-level female manager. Women comprised 31 per cent of permanent full-time workers, but among manufacturing firms, the figure plunged to 9.9 per cent<sup>20</sup>. Ethnicity and gender interact to create especially large pay gaps for minority women. In the United States, during the first quarter of 2012, Hispanic women earned on average 90 per cent of the wages of Hispanic men, but only 60 per cent of the wages of white men<sup>21</sup>

Based on Gary S. Fields (2011) analysis of labor market in developing countries, The composition of employment is very different in developing countries from what it is in developed countries but women's earnings are lower, women's work is more likely to be informal, and women are disproportionately in casual positions.<sup>22</sup> Table 1 shows the employment-to-population ratios and the gender gaps. Globally, between 2002 and 2007, women's employment-to-population ratio remained constant at about 49 per cent, compared to about 73 per cent for men.

In the run up to the recent financial crisis, the gender gap in the employment-to population ratio inched down to 24.6 percentage points. The most significant regional narrowing occurred in the Developed Economies and European Union region, Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the Middle East (albeit from a large gap of 52.6 points). Only Central and Eastern Europe and East Asia increased their gender gaps in employment, but by less than one percentage point.

Also the table shows, the three regions largely account for this increase in the gap, predominantly South Asia increasing its gap in the employment-to-population ratio from 45.9 to 48.1, the Middle East increasing its gap from 52 to 52.8 points, and Central and South-Eastern Europe and CIS, increasing its gap from 17.8 to 18.7

<sup>15</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, article 248

<sup>16</sup> World Bank, (2012), *World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development*

<sup>17</sup> International Labour Organization, 2012, "Global Employment Trends for Women," p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organization, 2009, "Global Employment Trends: Preventing a deeper jobs crisis," p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* p. 73

<sup>20</sup> The World Bank, Enterprise Surveys on gender see more:

<http://www.unwomen.org/co/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#sthash.ZeWAmru3.dpf>

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, 2012, "Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers" first quarter, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Gary S. Fields (2011), Labor market analysis for developing countries, *Labour Economics* 18 PP S16–S22

percentage points. All the other regions saw a decline in employment-to-population ratio gaps, by up to 2 percentage points.<sup>23</sup>

### **Women's Contributions to Sustainable Development are Undervalued**

In most societies, women are predominantly responsible to care for children, the elderly and the frail, and spent at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, of which care work is an integral part. However, this work, which is essential for the functioning of any economy, is hardly ever counted in any valuations of a country's economy and therefore remains largely invisible.

Table 1. Gender gaps in employment-to-population, 2002, 2007, and 2012

Region	Male employment- to population ratio (%)			Female employment-to- population ratio (%)			Gap percentage points		
	2002	2007	2012	2002	2007	20012	2002	2007	2012
World	73.7	73.5	72.7	48.6	49.0	47.8	24.8	24.6	24.8
Development economies & European Union	64.5	65.2	61.6	47.7	49.5	48.4	16.7	15.7	13.2
Central & South Eastern Europe (Non EU) & CIS	61.3	61.0	54.7	44.4	45.2	46.0	16.9	17.8	18.7
East Asia	77.4	76.8	75.4	66.4	65.6	64.0	10.9	11.2	11.4
South East Asia & Pacific	78.0	77.7	78.3	54.7	55.1	56.0	23.3	22.6	22.3
South Asia	79.8	79.4	78.5	34.2	33.6	30.4	45.7	45.9	48.1
Latin America & Caribbean	74.3	75.4	74.8	43.9	47.2	48.8	30.3	28.2	26.0
Middle East	66.3	67.1	68.2	13.7	15.1	15.3	52.6	52.0	52.8
North Africa	66.2	68.1	68.3	16.6	19.7	19.7	49.5	48.4	48.5
Sub Saharan frica	70.4	70.5	70.8	57.4	58.9	59.2	12.9	11.7	11.6

According to article 156 of Beijing Declaration for Action,<sup>24</sup> Women contribute to development not only through remunerated work but also through a great deal of unremunerated work. On the one hand, women participate in the production of goods and services for the market and household consumption, in agriculture, food production or family enterprises. Though included in the United Nations System of National Accounts and therefore in international standards for labour statistics, this unremunerated work - particularly that related to agriculture - is often undervalued and under recorded.

On the other hand, women still also perform the great majority of unremunerated domestic work and community work, such as caring for children and older persons, preparing food for the family, protecting the environment and providing voluntary assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups. This work is often not measured in quantitative terms and is not valued in national accounts. Women's contribution to development is seriously underestimated, and thus its social recognition is limited. The full visibility of the type, extent and distribution of this unremunerated work will also contribute to a better sharing of responsibilities. The Commission on the Status of Women (Fifty-fifth session) on 22 February-4 March 2011, regarding "gender equality and sustainable development" and Following-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". "While the relevance of gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development has long been established in intergovernmental commitments, such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>25</sup> and agenda 21,<sup>26</sup> and the Beijing Declaration<sup>27</sup> and Platform for Action,<sup>28</sup> it

<sup>23</sup> ILO, (2012), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> UN (1995), article 156

<sup>25</sup> UN (1992), annex I.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., annex II.

<sup>27</sup> UN (1995) annex I.

has become increasingly evident that women's contributions to sustainable development are both undervalued and underutilized.<sup>29</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

The paper begins by a descriptive analysis of gender and gender equality. Then the concept of sustainable development was defined. Actually there is a small differences between Gender equity and gender equality. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men and usually equity leads to equality. It was explained that when gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex.

Gender equity implies that women and men are treated fairly according to their different needs - this implies the possibilities of adopting different strategies in order to compensate women for their historical disadvantages. As mentioned approaches that use gender equity should eventually lead to gender equality. The major inequality exist in labor market and best policy advice in this relation is from the International Labor Organization which some of them are mentioned here:

- Re-skilling, training and unemployment protection, unemployment benefits and measures for women workers.
- Initiatives for women to return to work after maternity leave, incentives for men to take paternity leave and more accessible childcare services.
- Quotas for women in employment guarantee programmes targeted at the poorest households
- Work-sharing schemes which include workers that do not have regular contracts
- Cash transfer programmes for poor households Microcredit and microinsurance
- Public employment programmes
- Re-training of unemployed persons to new jobs which break gender stereotypes, especially
- for those with family responsibilities
- Keeping/increasing minimum wages, as women are lower paid than men due to the gender wage gap.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., annex II.

<sup>29</sup> Article 7, 11-26950 (E)



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