



Sustainable Development and Women Participation: A Sociological 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.

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 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.

I.INTRODUCTION

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot

The new edition of this publication brings together the latest available evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals, highlighting the progress made since 2015 but also the continued alarm over the COVID-19 pandemic, its immediate effect on women's well-being, and the threat it poses to future generations.

Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda

UN Women's flagship report demonstrates through evidence, new data and analysis how women and girls are faring across the world, and what it will take to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. [1,2,3]

With less than a decade to fulfill the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality is fundamental to delivering on the promises of sustainability, peace, and human progress. How far have we come in turning the 2030 Agenda into results for women and girls, how has COVID-19 set us back and what is needed to bridge the remaining gaps between rhetoric and reality

Sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources for today and for the future. It cannot be achieved without gender equality. Women's empowerment is a key factor for achieving sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development is broadly defined as development which meets the requirements of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development should be a key principle of all policies and actions, which are broadly designed to create a society which is based on freedom, democracy and respect for fundamental rights, fostering equality of opportunity and solidarity within and between



generations.

The sustainable development should be based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment, a high level of education and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.

Sustainable development should be a key objective for all national policies, and should aim at the continuous improvement of the quality of life on earth of both current and future generations. It is about safeguarding the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. It is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights including freedom and equal opportunities for all. It brings about solidarity within and between generations. It seeks to promote a dynamic economy with a high level of employment and education, of health protection, of social and territorial cohesion and of environmental protection in a peaceful and secure world, respecting cultural diversity.[4,5,6]

Viewed in a broad spectrum, women have played a vital role in the global environmental movement. The World Commission on Environment and Development, in its report entitled *Our Common Future*, published in 1988, linked the environmental crisis to unsustainable development and financial practices that were worsening the North-South gap, with women a majority of the world's poor and illiterate.

Over the years, women have continued to speak out for policies and practices that do not threaten the health and well-being of future generations. They continue to fight for improved living standards and protection of the environment. In almost all countries, women are disproportionately represented among the poor. And studies have found that the poor, in urban and rural areas of rich and poor countries, bear the greatest burden of environmental degradation and pollution.

Women share the primary responsibility for nutrition, child care and household management in almost all countries. They are also active in environmental management. In most developing countries, women play a major role as farmers, animal tenders, and water and fuel collectors. Yet, despite their roles, women are not adequately represented in the decision-making processes related to the issues of environment and development at local, national or international levels.

Having their expertise, knowledge and perspective been overlooked for years, women are now demanding that their voices be heard. They recognize that an integrated approach to sustainable development is necessary since political, economic, social and environmental issues are closely interlinked.[7,8,9]

Women took active part in the Rio Earth Summit process and succeeded in obtaining a chapter on women and sustainable development and over one hundred references and recommendations pertaining to women in the final agreement, Agenda 21. The 1992 Rio Summit, together with the 1993 Human Rights Conference, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 Social Summit and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, have focused the work of the United Nations on the environment, population, human rights, poverty and gender, and the relationships between these issues.

In Rio, women were considered a "major group" whose involvement was necessary to achieve sustainable development. Today, there is a growing emphasis on "mainstreaming"- integrally incorporating women's concerns and participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all development and environmental management programmes to ensure that women benefit. The United Nations system is in the process of mainstreaming a gender-perspective in its work.

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, emphasized that empowerment, full participation and equality for women are the foundations for peace and sustainable development. The plan also acknowledges that sustainable development policies that do not involve women and men alike will not succeed in the long run.

Women and poverty

According to broad estimates, more than one in five people around the world live in conditions of extreme poverty on little more than \$1 per day. In all developing regions except East Asia, the number of poor people has been rising since the 1980s. Studies indicate that the gaps between rich and poor are widening, and that the majority of the world's poor



are women. Since the 1970s, the number of rural women living below the poverty line has increased by 50 per cent, in comparison with 30 per cent for men.

Women accrue less income than men over their lifetime for a variety of reasons. They get paid less for the same work and are more likely to work less in order to reconcile their careers with child or elder care. These gaps in women's employment history reduce the amount of social security women gain. It also decreases the likelihood of receiving credit or loans. All these facts increase women's vulnerability to poverty, especially in old age. Governments must introduce policies, programmes and quota systems which correct this imbalance.[10,11,12]

The United Nations Development Programme has defined sustainable development as development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that regenerates the environment rather than destroying it, and that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It is development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Many women's groups are concerned that current patterns of economic development and globalization are increasing the gap between rich and poor, benefiting men more than women, and leading to increased environmental degradation. One report published by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), "The imperatives of the global economy seem to be outrunning the post-Rio agenda five years later. How to bring them into closer step is the current challenge." Women are calling for gender-sensitive research in this area. They are also calling for increased access to resources - land, credit, education, technology and information--so that they can participate equally with men in key decisions that affect their lives and all life on planet Earth.

Women have also raised demand that Governments establish new forms of economic accounting to include women's unpaid work and promote public policies that will reduce the disproportionate time women spend working, which is often twice as much as men.

Management of natural resources

In almost all developing regions, women are often the primary users and managers of land, forest, water and other natural resources. Women in rural areas of developing regions spend major parts of their day growing food, gathering fuel wood, cooking and carrying water.

Women are responsible for most local food production in Africa and Asia. Consequently, they are responsible for the selection of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and the maintenance of productive soil to nourish seedlings and plants. Women are also users, preservers and managers of biodiversity. Research on 60 home gardens in Thailand revealed 230 different species - many of which had been rescued from a neighbouring forest before it was cleared.

Indigenous women have a special relationship to natural resources. Their cultures and practices promote a balanced, respectful use and preservation of natural resources so that future generations can meet their needs. Yet most development schemes today ignore the needs and practices of indigenous peoples.

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. However, due to discrimination, many women are unable to exercise their full potential in natural resource and environmental management, given their lack of training, status, land and property rights and capital.[13,14,15]

Women and water

In rural areas in most developing countries, women are the managers of water resources - often walking miles to fetch water for basic household chores. In some parts of Africa, women and children spend eight hours a day collecting water. The proportion of rural women affected by water scarcity is estimated at 55 per cent in Africa, 32 per cent in Asia and 45 per cent in Latin America.

Access to safe water is also an issue of increasing concern for urban women and families. Poor water access and quality affect not only women's crop and livestock production and the amount of labour they must expend to collect, store and distribute water, but also their health and that of their families. Water-borne diseases such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid, malaria and diarrhoea claim millions of lives each year. Parasitic diseases, such as onchocerciasis (river



blindness), are also spread through contaminated water.

However, despite their responsibility for water collection and sanitation management, women rarely participate in decision-making when the construction of facilities is planned. All too often they have no say about the location of a pump or the design of latrines. It is now recognized that the exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure. In order to improve health and quality of life for women, water and sanitation programmes must concentrate on reducing the time and energy women expend in water collection, and increasing women's participation in community decision-making regarding water and sanitation.

Efforts must also be increased to ensure access to safe water. According to broad estimates, currently, more than one billion people in developing countries do not have access to safe water.

Women's contribution to sustainable development must be recognized. Women have a strong role in education and socializing their children, including teaching them care and responsibility with regard to the use and protection of natural resources. More should be done to increase women's voice in environmental decision making and to enable women to seize opportunities in the "green economy". More capacity building programmes and training tailored to the needs of women are needed. In order to build women as catalyst for sustainable development, their role in family, community and society at large has to free from socio-cultural and religious traditions that prevent women participation. There is need for change of mindset, especially of the males who dominate the scene.[16,17,18]

II.DISCUSSION

Women play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of sustainable development efforts. Their full and equal participation in decision-making and policy development is essential to create and maintain this pathway. Mainstreaming women's greater participation in these roles is also crucial in ensuring the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, restricted opportunities for women to access education, employment, leisure, and political participation reinforce gender-based social and economic inequalities. According to UNESCO, approximately 132 million girls do not attend school worldwide. Moreover, gender stereotypes and biases in educational materials and teaching practices remain pervasive, often discouraging girls from pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) studies. This disparity further translates into women's low representation in critical sectors such as healthcare technology, environmental fields, and top executives in private companies.

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The economic gender gap remains significant. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women's labour force participation rate stood at 47 percent in 2017, compared to 72 percent for men. Even when women do work, they often earn less than men. The World Bank data indicates that in 2019, women earned, on average, 77 cents for every dollar that men earned for doing the same work. According to the UN Women, women perform three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. This imbalance, as of January 2016, women made up only 25.5 percent of national parliamentarians globally, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). At this rate, it will take another 50 years to reach gender parity in politics.

When it comes to the protection of rights, World Bank also reported that in 2018, women had only three-quarters of the legal rights afforded to men on average. Furthermore, women continue to experience higher rates of violence. A UN Women report claimed that 1 in 3 women globally had experienced either physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives.

The pursuit of sustainable development cannot be effectively undertaken without the full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making and policy development. While there are numerous challenges on the path to gender equality, there are also many solutions, from legal and policy reform to cultural shifts. The significant contributions of women in leadership serve as potent reminders of the transformative potential of women's empowerment.

Women leaders often prioritise social issues, including education, health, and social justice, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable society.



Women in decision-making roles can generate positive outcomes for companies and societies. Research compiled by the Frank Recruitment Group in 2017 found that 87 percent of the top 500 companies led by a female reported profits above the average. In contrast, only 78 percent of companies without a female CEO achieved the same level of success. Their presence in decision-making roles can also inspire future generations of women leaders, thereby furthering the cause of gender equality. Moreover, women leaders often prioritise social issues, including education, health, and social justice, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable society.

A case in point is Jacinda Ardern's leadership, praised for its effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Angela Merkel's strong leadership style brought her recognition as the leader of the free world, demonstrating audacity by opening doors to thousands of people seeking asylum in Germany while ensuring it stayed the fourth-largest economy in the world.

Thus, it is critical to move from the mere 'inclusion' of women to nurturing them into undertaking decision-making roles to establish sustainable development effectively and incorporate gender equality at its core. Not only should women's capabilities be enhanced and their rights protected, but they should also be provided with equal opportunities to engage in decision-making and policy development processes. Propelling women to leadership roles is a multi-faceted task requiring changes on the part of multiple stakeholders.[19,20]

Governments must further enact and enforce laws promoting women's equal participation in all areas of public and private life.

The journey, however, begins with women's equal representation. To begin with, policy interventions by governments can help to achieve this. For instance, Norway has successfully implemented a 40-percent participation for women on corporate boards and has recently proposed expanding it to cover unlisted countries as well. Governments must further enact and enforce laws promoting women's equal participation in all areas of public and private life. These laws should also prohibit discrimination based on gender and sanction appropriate measures for violations. Corporations should be incentivised to include women in leadership roles. Conscious enablement of talented women managers to be retained and rise in corporate structures is necessary.

As mere representation in political and corporate governance is not enough, women should be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in decision-making processes. This can be achieved through capacity-building programs, training, mentorship initiatives, and enabling women to network better for growth.

Education is the next big frontier for women. Education systems should encourage girls to be active participants, leaders, and decision-makers. Introducing and reinforcing gender equality concepts from an early age can help create a society that values and promotes women's participation in decision-making roles. In higher education, barriers to women's participation in STEM fields and their subsequent employment in related fields must be identified and eliminated.

Education systems should encourage girls to be active participants, leaders, and decision-makers. Introducing and reinforcing gender equality concepts from an early age can help create a society that values and promotes women's participation in decision-making roles.

Societies must challenge and change patriarchal norms and attitudes that consider women less capable of leadership. Encouraging a cultural shift towards recognizing and appreciating women's capabilities is essential for their inclusion in key roles that can influence change.

Incorporating women into leadership roles meaningfully is challenging. It requires concerted efforts from individuals, societies, governments, and global organisations. These efforts, however, are an investment towards creating a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable world. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. As we advance in the decade of action, we must remember that gender equality is not just a standalone goal but a crucial facilitator in achieving all our sustainable development objectives. Thus, our success in sustainable development hinges heavily on our ability to foster gender equality, dismantle patriarchal norms, and amplify the voices and capabilities of women worldwide.[22]



III.RESULTS

On the first day of January 2016, a historic UN Summit laid the agenda for sustainable development by way of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also known as the “Global Goals,” they bring back the focus on the centrality of women in every sphere of societal and economic development.

As verified by a University of Wisconsin-Madison study, women constitute half of the world’s population and perform almost two-thirds of its work hours.

Forming such a sizable proportion of the population, women are not just on the frontlines of development goals but are also deeply impacted by environmental, social, and economic issues, at times more than men and boys.

Are women the key to sustainable development?

This World Economic Forum report says that there is a worrying picture of the progress of sustainable development goals. Going by the research paper published by UN Women, the world is not on track to achieving gender equality by 2030.

Is there a connection between these two trends?

The answer is yes.

Earlier, women and girls were majorly involved in issues that only about them. These mainly include reproductive and maternal health, gender-based violence, child marriage, etc. It proved to be a mistake.

The efforts made towards environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainable development are fraught with a crucial missing link: that of involving women in efforts and decision-making.

The role of women in sustainable development is multidimensional and their voices need to be included at every forefront.

They are often the first responders to their families, have unique ideas and perspectives, and often drive change at various levels.

Women’s role in the global health scenario[23]

According to this UNICEF study, close to 810 women die every day from entirely preventable complications. This is mainly due to the lack of affordable and accessible healthcare systems.

Add to it the fact that women also face high rates of sexual and domestic violence without access to appropriate redressal methods. Decimation against them in terms of pay and professional roles is also rampant.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics 77.6 per cent of women make up the total workforce in health care and social assistance.

Investing in this section of the population by way of providing them with good healthcare systems, non-discriminatory opportunities, and safe spaces will improve their chances of achieving SDG 3 (Good health and well-being).

Women and climate change

Women are more closely related to climate change than is apparent. Constituting almost 43 percent of the global agricultural labour force and are often the early adopters of new technology.



Any investment in uplifting women and improving their capabilities will have a direct impact on food security, water conservation, and renewable energy, which are all key sustainability areas.

Women's empowerment and education

According to a recent report by The World Bank, almost 129 million girls are out of school, mainly due to poverty. Other reasons include conflict, violence, natural disasters, child marriage, etc.

Investing in education for girls has a tremendous social impact. They not just gain the socio-economic skills necessary to find their way in the world but also are more empowered about their health and nutrition.

Educated girls also make for a stronger and more stable workforce, contributing to economic growth. This will lead to the attainment of SDG 1 (No poverty).

Promoting gender equality in the form of equitable rights, responsibilities, and opportunities is not just a precursor for human rights-led social justice but is imperative for all-around development and not just Women Empowerment. To learn about ways to empower women and achieve the goals of sustainable development in your community, get in touch with the Mahila Housing Trust.

Change is the law of nature and due to its dynamic nature, we see developments as per the time and needs of people but, in today's modern world these developments are taking place with little or even no breaks. Enough of everything for everyone to utilize but nothing left for the future generations is nothing to be proud of, therefore Sustainable development comes into the picture. Sustainable development was coined in the Brundtland report in 1987 defined as practices that need to be practised by countries to tackle challenges posed by climate change and following guidelines to meet the present needs of people and to grow in a way that saves natural resources for future generations.[24]

United Nations enacted 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) under the Paris agreement, 2015, and the goals effectively signify the importance of gender equality and the role of empowerment to achieve the agenda of 2030. For instance, Goal 5 states the need of empowering women and girls and gender equality to achieve global sustainability. But as it seems Sustainable Development and Gender equality are goals that are needed to be achieved specifically but the linkage between the two could not be ignored. Therefore, how can women's empowerment help in achieving these goals, and Why women's empowerment is necessary for sustainable development will be explored in this article?

LINKAGE BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sustainable development rests on four pillars that are social development, economic development, environmental protection, and preservation of cultural diversity. We tend to associate women empowerment or gender equality with just as social development and Accountability for both women and natural resources contribution towards world development keep on missing, Therefore, the very first commonality which I find between women's unaccounted unpaid work and Natural resources is that they are portrayed as a giver, not asking for returns or as a source of infinite services which are often not accounted for.

Recognition of the feminine touch to the work, economy, environment is not desired but needed and the inequality not only affects the development of the nation but also affects the balance of nature. Similarly, Sustainable development is not desired but needed and the goals like Goal 5 to achieve gender equality, Goal 1 that states the end of poverty by 2030, Similarly Goal 3 on ensuring health infrastructure and Goal 8 and Goal 10 about productive employment and reducing inequalities are needed for better future.[i]

As quoted by Former UN secretary Kofi Annan "Gender equality is more than a goal itself; it is a precondition of meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance".



WOMEN AND ECONOMY

When women work, economies grow. [22,23]

Greater gender equality refers to equal opportunities to all sections of the society, it is associated with a country means a country with better health and education, inclusive economic growth, and greater international competitiveness. Women's participation in the economy has a major impact on healthcare, education, and the environment, the participation of women makes the cycle of development go smoothly. If even for one-day women stop doing the domestic work for free and stop taking care of their families, economies will be affected so let us not make domestic work an automatic choice for women, and a more accountable and respectable system is required for women's who are home-makers. Therefore, not only women's empowerment in developing countries is a good measure but a smart thing to do. For instance, India could boost its growth by 1.5 percentage points to 9 percent per year if around 50% of women could join the workforce.

The issue of lesser participation of women in the economy should be handled responsibly and effective measures to aware women of their rights should be done for better sustainable development.

WOMEN AND DECISION MAKING

Women were kept aloof from the powers of decision-making since ancient times and their unequal access and representation in health, education, and in the decision-making process has had lowered their position in society. No section of the society must be left due to lack of awareness and access therefore, the idea of more women in decision making should be promoted as they are potential users of the facilities and a major part in the implementation of the policies.

WHY MORE WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING?

The answer to this question is that More women in decision making bring a different perspective to the table which might have been unexplored previously and most importantly, when little girls and women who are still being infused by the patriarchal society look at the women with leadership roles, they should get in them that it is achievable because Afterall, the whole game is about mindsets.

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

Women all around the world are the user and managers of natural resources like water, fuel, food, and forests and this is due to their major participation in domestic work and informal sectors of the economy, and in today's world, Domestic work is sometimes seen as a weakness but the analogy is quite misguided as Due to the association of a large number of women's with this work comes with the great power over nature [20,21]

As that women are in the best position to make a contribution to family planning that can help control the population. Secondly, Women association with their households can ensure cleanliness and as we know dirtiness and an unhygienic environment lead to bad health and wealth. The point is With Adequate environmental education and awareness women can conserve energy resources far more efficiently as compared to men.

Women being so close to nature and its resources can realize environmental issues better as they are the roots of the nation and couldn't be ignored. If Empowerment is the key to development, then why are we still debating on women's role and importance for the development of the economy, environment, and overall development so Let us take a quick dive into the reasons for fewer women participation.

REASONS FOR FEWER WOMEN PARTICIPATION

- Women are paid less than men, it is not an unknown fact and one of the major reasons for less participation by women. The wage gap certainly establishes the fact of women being less eligible for work than their male counterparts and a notion is spread in the minds of women to compromise and settle more than men in the workforce. According to the 2017 gender gap report, the wage gap remained at 23 percent and seemed



unchanged in 2019 and 2018. And it should be noted that these figures can't be relied on completely as the gender wage gap exists in developing countries where women tend to be employed in the informal sector and self-employment and the number for those are not considered in the report.

- Women have less social and family support which pulls them back mentally, gender inequalities in employment result in unwanted disadvantages in various spheres of employment like availability of pensions, security of work, and unemployment benefits or maternity compensation and protection. These are the struggles faced by an average woman seeking a way out to earn but it gets much more difficult for girls and women from low-income families to get out of the norm when the only goal of their families is to marry them. A hollow narrowness of the society and pre-defined roles of women leads to lesser participation of women in the development of the nations.
- Violence and harassment in the world of work affect women regardless of age, location, income, or social status which makes them hesitant to work. A narrative of Women being naïve to understand the atrocities of the world is well established and the cases of violence and harassment at work add fuel to the fire and create more confusion and anxiety among women to work. This lack of sense of security holds a lot of women from moving to different places for better opportunities at work.[19,20]
- The digital divide is one of the specific reasons for the fewer participation of women as a lot of women from rural areas are still offline and the majority of them being women leads to less awareness of the reforms taking place and thus in a way haphazardly causes implementation.
- Environment degradation has a huge impact, especially on women and children. The perceived notion of lack of authority among Women's especially women farmers and women working in the informal sector are seen as less of the owner of their property, it affects the rights of women in business and their rights.[ii]

IV.CONCLUSION

Women empowerment for sustainable development is not only important but necessary Though, Sustainability is subjective to one's perspective but women's role in it could not be ignored, be it economically, politically, or socially and to ensure the development of the world we must encourage more and more female participation and recognize the loopholes and ensure the implementation of policies effectively as "Leaving no one behind without harming resources for future generation is the goal, and we all are learning and evolving but ignorance is no bliss, therefore, we as individuals should do actively participate through our government and authorities because Recognizing, Realizing and Implementing will lead us to better future.[24]

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