

# Women Empowerment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goal

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**Abstract:** *Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is essential to achieve sustainable development goals. Empowerment of women and girls is to be realized through sustainable development, Sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources and it cannot be achieved without gender equality. 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. Women's empowerment is a key factor for achieving sustainability. Women and girls are crucial contributors, implementers and beneficiaries of on - going development. Women's contribution to sustainable development must be recognized. The objective of this paper is to highlight the significance of women contribution in sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Gender equality, Development Goals, Women Empowerment

## 1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the heart of its implementation with its promise to "leave no one behind". It provides an unprecedented opportunity to transform the lives of women and girls and to catalyse progress towards development in all dimensions: economic, social and environmental. With its universal and transformative mandate, the 2030 Agenda outlines a set of 17 integrated Sustainable Development Goals and targets to achieve our common aspiration for a more equitable and inclusive world.

Goal 5 is the stand - alone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It targets the removal of barriers to achieve gender equality and address issues that catalyse the achievement of the other goals in the framework.

Gender equality lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which set an ambitious universal plan of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals within 15 years (UN 2015). It recognizes that realizing gender equality is a matter of human rights and is crucial to progress across all the goals and targets. However, the SDGs will not be attained if women are denied access to resources and opportunities for education, employment and decision - making.

Gender equality is a goal in its own right enshrined in SDG 5 and it cuts across all 17 SDGs within the Agenda, which contains 45 targets and 54 indicators related to gender equality. It is found to have positive effects on promoting economic growth and labor productivity (SDG 8) and enhancing human capital through health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4), which has important implication for poverty reduction (SDG 1). Gender equality is also critical for attaining food security (SDG 2) and addressing climate change (SDG 13), while also strengthening resilience to climate - related disasters and managing natural resources. Furthermore, providing equal opportunities for women's participation in decision - making processes is beneficial for

ensuring more peaceful and inclusive communities (SDG 16).

### The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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. The UN General Assembly adopted in New York on 25 September 2015 the resolution on the post - 2015 development agenda entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entails 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which came into force on the 1st of January 2016. The specific targets of each SDG are to be achieved by 2030.

The SDGs are built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, contrarily to the MDGs that were intended for action in developing countries only, the SDGs apply to all countries. They cover the three above mentioned dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

The United nations has identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals which have to be realized by 2030. These SDGs are - 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well - being for all at all ages; 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and

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production patterns; 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; 15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; 16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

SDGs also known as the Global Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty and gender discrimination, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity in years to come. These 17 Goals build focuses on areas such as climate change, gender inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice. The goals are interconnected – often the key to success will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership to make the right choices to improve life in a sustainable way for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt 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. (UNDP, 2016).

#### The SDG targets

The following target has been included to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by UNDP:

- 1) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere;
- 2) Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation;
- 3) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation;
- 4) Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
- 5) Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life;
- 6) Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;
- 7) 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;
- 8) Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women;

- 9) Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

#### Women's Empowerment

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".

Gender equality and empowering all women and girls is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which have to be realized by 2030. Gender equality is only possible if women are competent enough and empowered. It has been long and widely argued that women are the key to sustainable development: 'the achievement of sustainable development is inextricably bound up with the establishment of women's equality' (WRI, 1994).

The World Economic Forum published the Global Gender Report 2017, stating that, despite the fact that women represent half of the world's population, they do not have access to the same level of health assistance, education, economic participation, potential earning and political decision making power.

Gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women, illiteracy, financial constraints, professional inequality, workplace harassment, inequality in sharing the burden of house hold work, lack of health care and safety, violence against women, decreased self - esteem and identifying abilities and potential, lack of proper educational programme are some obstacles that go against the way of women empowerment in India.

Women empowerment is a process to make women progressive, educated, financially independent, having good health and enjoying a good social status. It further refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal - rights to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, so as to make their own choices and decisions, self - respect and dignity, get safe and comfortable working environment, get equal opportunity for education and employment and have equal social status in the society.

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 (UNDP, 2008). 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.

### Empowering women and sustainable development

"The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, the social and environmental." (Resolution 70/1 adopted by the General Assembly).

Gender equality and women's empowerment figure prominently in the 2030 Agenda. They are reflected in an integrated manner throughout the Agenda, and also considered critical for its achievement: in the Resolution on the Agenda, the General Assembly declares that "realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets". The role of women's empowerment in the 2030 Agenda can be further concretized by looking at the SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and its targets.

Sustainable development encompasses socio - cultural, economic and environmental aspects and thus covers an extremely wide area. 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 and environment and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development 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 achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices 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. 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.

## 2. Conclusion

The implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in India is well on track and the performance on various goals has been mixed. The covid - 19 situation has created hurdles in all countries and the achievements of the goals by the deadline 2030 are uncertain. On gender equality, India needs a lot of changes to be made by government policy making bodies and civil society. The rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and girls are to be implemented. To ensure women's rights, strong legal and legislative changes are required. Gender mainstreaming is to be reported as a strategy. It ensures that gender equality is central to all activities - legislation, advocacy, policy development, resource allocation, implementation, monitoring, research etc. The existing government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samrudhi Yojana, Janani Suraksha Yojana for mothers, women entrepreneurship programs etc. are to be deepened and widened to reach the benefits to the target population. Financial inclusion and social inclusion programs are to be prepared to benefit women and girls. Commercial banks have designed women specific schemes to attract women entrepreneurs to come forward and prove their entrepreneurial talent.

Awareness is to be created and more sensitization programs are to be organized on gender equality and women empowerment. Education, health, employment, political participation and peaceful existence are the areas in which women and girls are to be supported and brought to the mainstream so that their role and participation contributes to nation building on the one hand and achieve gender equality on the other. To mainstream the involvement of women and girls in sustainable development, it demands a change in attitudes and behavior towards women and girls across all levels. All 17 SDG's will collectively help to achieve gender equality through women empowerment.

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