

SDG5 – GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

CONCISE GUIDES TO THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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SDG5 – GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

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PREFACE

The post-2015 agenda for Sustainable Development envisions a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Investing in women and in processes to utilise their services, knowledge, experience and labour is a critical step in achieving this objective. This book is an attempt to explore the issues and challenges faced in realising the Goals and Targets under Sustainable Development Goals-5.

Gender inequalities have several facets which manifest themselves in different forms according to the context and situation of a region or community. Discrimination against women primarily takes shape during socialisation of individuals which ascribes certain roles and responsibilities to men and women. The gender stereotypes created are so deeply engrained in our minds that we tend to perceive gender equality only as a woman's issue. Men tend to be isolated from the process; this gives a very narrow perspective to issues of gender inequality. Women's realities are constantly changing with time and situation, with new manifestations of discrimination regularly emerging. There are several factors that contribute to this discrimination; there are still others that increase or promote gender stereotyping.

Depriving women and girls of equal participation, choices and opportunities has several implications not only for their lives, but also for the future of the planet as a whole. This short book on gender equality outlines the various dimensions, namely, social, economic and political, which form the

three pillars of sustainable development and how women have been systematically excluded from the process of development. The work suggests that the process of sustainable development is incomplete without women's participation and that much needs to be done to ensure their inclusion in the process. However, the lack of control and access to various resources and property is an obstacle to women making their contribution to the process of development. The role of childbearing and childrearing, the non-economic status of domestic work performed by women, low participation in economic activities and paid labour further exacerbate their inherently low position in society. Cultural norms and practices perpetuate their insignificant participation in various decision making and leadership activities in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres of societies. This leads to the persistence of 'inequality traps', whereby women are unable to escape the vicious circle.

This book puts existing studies into perspective, discusses various aspects of gender-based discrimination and its manifestation across various dimensions. It further describes the importance of women's participation in the overall realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is divided into nine chapters.

The first chapter 'Background' discusses a basic understanding of the issue of gender discrimination and how the phenomenon is related to the concept of sustainable development. The second chapter 'Understanding Gender Inequality' discusses the roots of gender inequality and the basic factors and institutions which are responsible for reinforcing the phenomenon at various levels. The third chapter 'Gender Inequalities as a Social, Economic and Political Challenge of Our Times' highlights various issues which have implications for gender equality. The underlying challenges for developmental planning are described. The chapter also examines the consequences of the

disadvantaged position of women. The fourth chapter 'Drivers and Indicators of Gender Inequality' discusses the various measures and indicators used to assess the situation and condition of women at various levels and their importance in formulating policies and programmes associated with women's welfare. The fifth chapter 'Gender Inequalities in Developing, Middle Income and Developed Countries' provides a comparative analysis of the different situations of women in countries at different stages of development, namely developing, middle income and developed countries. The sixth chapter 'Women and the Sustainable Development Agenda: A Historical Perspective' highlights the challenges that gender-based discrimination pose to society and the world community as a whole in social, economic and political terms. Starting from Brundtland Commission report the chapter gives a glimpse of the global concerns for sustainability during past few decades. This chapter concludes with the description of SDG-05. The seventh chapter 'The Relationship of SDG5 to Other Goals' elaborates on the interlinkages between SDG5 and other SDGs and the critical role played by women in achieving the process of sustainable development. The eighth chapter 'Policy Action for Gender Equality' discusses the various policy strategies that may be used to tackle the problem of gender inequality. Finally, the ninth chapter 'Some Reflections on Inequalities' brings out the concept as the defining challenge of our times and gives our concluding remarks.

Umesh Chandra Pandey
Chhabi Kumar

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BACKGROUND

There is a widespread realisation across the world that the basic objective of human development should be to increase people's choices. It calls for a system which enhances equality of opportunity and empowers people to participate in and benefit from the development process (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1995). Despite this realisation, inequalities continue to persist due to a number of traditional, religious, social, economic and political factors. The causes and consequences of these inequalities have been the subject of a large body of scholarship worldwide. It is evident that any society which does not value every individual and provide enabling conditions for them to realise their full potential cannot progress sustainably. It should be viewed as a matter of not only human rights but also economics.

One of the major groups which requires special attention in this context is women – constituting half the world's population. It is widely recognised that gender equality is a major

prerequisite for the sustainability of the world economy. The matter has come to the forefront of international development with the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of United Nations (UN, nd).

While speaking on the occasion of United Nations Association of New York Humanitarian Awards Dinner, in New York on 29 October 2014, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, emphasised as follows (2014a):

We cannot fulfil 100 per cent of the world's potential by excluding 50 per cent of the world's people. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all.

Several studies have amply demonstrated that empowering women, be it in the market place, office or household, increases overall efficiency, well-being and the quality of decision making. However, the condition of women in most societies is far from satisfactory; they are often not involved in most of the decision-making process within the household or community at large. This is largely because of the comparatively lower status ascribed to women in most societies. Despite several research-based findings – and despite the measures taken by the world community to address this challenge – much remains to be done on issues pertaining to gender inequality. We still have several countries where governmental policies restrict women's participation in entrepreneurial and employment activities. The World Bank's study *Women, Business and the Law* 2016 (World Bank, 2015), covering 173 economies, demonstrates that in most parts of the world women's productive capacity and participation is still restricted, and they continue to suffer from discrimination (Box 1).

Box 1. Patterns of Discrimination against Women across the World.

- (a) Legal gender differences are widespread: 155 of the 173 economies covered have at least one law impeding women's economic opportunities.
- (b) The total number of legal gender differences across 173 economies is 943.
- (c) In 100 economies, women face gender-based job restrictions.
- (d) 46 of the economies covered have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence.
- (e) In 18 economies, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working.
- (f) Lower legal gender equality is associated with fewer girls attending secondary school relative to boys, fewer women working or running businesses and a wider gender wage gap.
- (g) Over the past two years, 65 economies carried out 94 reforms increasing women's economic opportunities.

Source: World Bank (2015, p. 2).

GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The contribution of women's labor – in and outside the home – which is absolutely vital for the well-being of the society, continues to remain undervalued and mostly invisible (Action Aid, 2015, p. 2). Furthermore, their roles in society have been largely stereotyped, thereby undermining

their true potential to contribute to society. It has been estimated that the underutilisation of women's true potential leads to significant loss for the global economy. The World Bank CEO Kristalina Georgieva highlights the connection between earning gaps between men and women and the consequent economic loss for the global economy as follows (World Bank, 2018b):

The world is essentially leaving \$160 trillion on the table when we neglect inequality in earnings over the lifetime between men and women.

Socio-cultural constraints, access to resources and educational levels have pushed women to a level where it is difficult for them to escape from poverty traps. Women are considered and treated as subordinates to men; this is a practice which is prevalent in several parts of the worlds. As a result of this subordination, women are often subjected to various types of discrimination, humiliation, oppression, control, exploitation and various forms of violence (Bhasin, 1993). Gender inequality manifests itself differently across education, employment opportunities, healthcare facilities, life expectancy, family life and political participation. Widespread gender discrimination, the cost it inflicts and the magnitude of injustice it represents is the defining challenge of our times. These issues have significantly attracted the attention of global community (Box 2).

As the global community grapples with the challenges of sustainable development, there is an increasing realisation that the underlying drivers of unsustainability and the phenomenon of gender inequality are deeply interlocked and interdependent. This has not only serious consequences for women, but also incurs major costs for all, including businesses and the wider economy. The study carried out by Action Aid (2015, p. 3) underscores the importance of women's work and emphasises its role in sustainable development as follows:

Box 2. Important Mile Stones in the Journey of Female Empowerment (1946–2015).

1946
Commission on the Status of Women

It is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

Reference: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

1975
World Conference of the International Women's Year

The First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975, reuniting 133 governments and designing a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year, providing measures and indications for the advancement of women for the upcoming decade.

Reference: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/mexico.html>

1979
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Often considered as an international bill of rights for women, the CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

Reference: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/committee.htm>

1994 20-Year Programme of Action	The 20-year Programme of Action was adopted by 179 countries, on the occasion of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. Reference: https://www.unfpa.org/icpd
1995 Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action	The Fourth World Conference on Women produced the Beijing Declaration and its Platform of Action, unanimously adopted by 189 countries and considered as the most progressive scheme and road map for advancing women's rights. Reference: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html
2000 Millennium Declaration (Millennium Goal Number 3)	MDG3 aims at promoting gender equality and empowering women. Its target 3.A focuses on the need to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Reference: https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml
2010 UN Women	In the framework of the UN Reform Agenda, the UN General Assembly established UN Women to accelerate the organisation's goals on gender equality and empowerment of women. Reference: http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women

<p>2015 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goal 05 And Beijing +20</p>	<p>Goal 5 aims at achieving gender equality and empowers all women and girls. Its targets include ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, as well as elimination of harmful practices and the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work.</p> <p>Reference: https://sustainable-development.un.org/topics/gender-equalityandwomensempowerment</p>
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Source: Adapted from the Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform.

... the vast amount of women's work, which is either rewarded poorly or not rewarded at all, is being used to subsidise the world economy and fuel unequal and unsustainable growth.

The need to achieve gender equality is clearly stated in the outcome document of United Nation Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex, paras 31 and 45; Box 3). The resolution contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development through focussed interventions for gender equality. Achieving equality between women and men is therefore a major developmental imperative of our times.

Box 3. General Assembly Resolution 66/288, Annex, Paras 31 and 45.

‘We recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women’s equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making We underscore that women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. We recognise 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, programmes and decision-making at all levels’.

SDGS – DO WOMEN HOLD THE KEY?

The SDGs as mandated by the United Nations are guidelines that help national governments globally plan and implement programmes and activities for development. The SDGs emerged from the realisation that development processes in various countries, besides putting a strain on already depleting resources across the globe and degrading the environment, were far from inclusive and equitable. Depriving women and girls of equal participation, choice and opportunities have several implications not only for their lives, but also for the future of the planet as a whole. It is beyond doubt that promoting inclusive development and making efforts to combat climate change are closely linked. Urgent action is required to control the damage caused to natural systems by