



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women, who make up more than half the world’s population, have always been – and remain – the deciding influence on the quality of life and well-being of their families and communities. Although they continue to be represented excessively among the world’s most accessible groups, as admittance to resources and power remains greatly distorted towards men. Women empowerment is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable economic improvement, social advancement and environmental sustainability. Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The centrality of women’s empowerment and the realization of women’s rights in achieving sustainable development have been increasingly recognized in recent decades. This recognition is evident in a number of international norms and agreements, International norms and standards on women’s and girls’ human rights and gender equality provide a solid basis for advancing action to strengthen the vital role of women in achieving sustainable development.

This paper focuses on women’s empowerment as a key process in reaching gender equality and, through that, sustainable development. It first discusses the concepts of women’s empowerment and sustainable development and shows how both are inter-linked through the lens of intra and inter-generational justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean ‘deifying women’ rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity. It is a process that encompasses both the creation of an enabling environment for women which is free of discrimination, and strengthening women’s ability to take control over their own lives and fully contribute to bringing about the needed changes in our societies.

Sustainable development is “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It is an economic, social and environmental development that ensures human well-being and dignity, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice, now and in the future.

It contains three core elements:

1. Economic growth
2. Social inclusion
3. Environmental protection

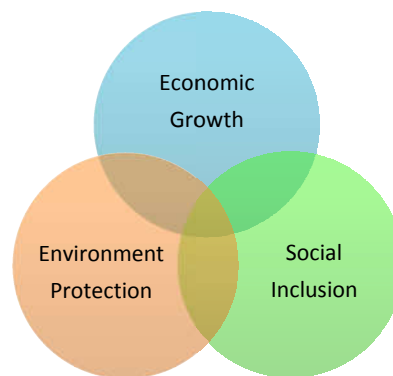


Figure 1

Sustainable development aims at eradicating poverty through, in particular, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living and fostering equitable social development and inclusion.

Linking women empowerment and sustainable development is important for several reasons

First, it is an ethical and moral exigent: achieving gender equality and achieving the human rights, pride and adequacy of diverse groups of women is a principal requirement of a just and sustainable world.

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Second, it is critical to compensate the excessive impact of economic, social and environmental affliction and stresses on women, which attenuate the enjoyment of their human rights and their acute roles in sustaining their families and communities.

Third, and most considerably, it is substantial to build up women's agency and capacities to create better synergies between gender equality and sustainable development outcomes.

Women are playing as natural resource managers and agents of change. It is important to recognize this role and to draw on women's commitment and expertise in shaping strategies and decisions. Intra-generational equity cannot be achieved without addressing the gender relations which underlie prevailing inequity. Nor can inter-generational equity be obtained, or responsibility to pass on a more equitable world to future generations is met, if inequalities continue to be perpetuated. Gender disparity is among the most pervasive forms of inequality in the world and without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved.

The lack of progress on gender equality may be at the heart of the failure to advance on sustainable development. If women were in more productive and decision-making roles, we could be moving faster and more assuredly towards sustainability in the economic, social and environmental sense. Parallels between the treatment of women and nature are no coincidence, but have an ancient history in mythology and religion, with powerful concepts. Women are more vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change but also have different perspectives, concerns and ideas for change. Until these are taken on board, with women empowered to play a full part in decision-making at all levels, environmental sustainability will remain a distant goal.

Objective

- To understand the importance of accelerating the pace of change in women's development;
- To study the role & importance of women empowerment for a sustainable future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alvarez and Lopez M. (2013) "Gender equality is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable development."

Kabeer N. and Natali L. (2013) A simple "win-win" relationship between gender equality and sustainability cannot be assumed. Indeed, some patterns of economic growth are premised on maintaining gender inequalities, such as through maintaining gender wage gaps and entrenching gender discriminatory norms, values and institutions.

Dankelman I. (2010) "Women contribute to sustainable development but they are also affected by the implications of environmental degradation and the negative effects of climate change."

UNDP (2008) "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"

OSAGI (2001) "There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between women and men - equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities - is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centered development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Scope of Study

Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. Women empowerment is of utmost significance in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable development of society. This study provides an insight to the current scenario as well as the future trends which may follow.

Types of Research

It is the framework for conducting the research project. The research design used here is Descriptive Research Design which is used for description of something.

For this purpose **Secondary Data** collected through:

- Internet and web search
- Newspaper and magazines

Findings

The centrality of gender equality has also been articulated in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", adopted in 2012, which included recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment across the three pillars of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental, and resolve to promote gender equality and women's full participation in sustainable development policies, programs and decision-making at all levels.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without a more impartial dispensation of resources today and tomorrow. Minimizing the imbalance is an important condition in "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Economic, social and environmental affair need to be commenced in an integrated and aggregate manner. From a gender outlook, it is particularly necessary not to concede gender equality as a socio-cultural concern but to give it due attention in the economic and environmental domain as well - treating gender equality as a crosscutting target. Demographic, political and economic changes are the internal factors behind the growth of women organizations. The empowerment occurs when women achieve increased control and participation in decision making that leads to their better access to resources, and therefore, improved social and economic status. There can be identified five levels of

empowerment, namely, welfare, access to resources and services, forming groups for defending interests, mobilization of efforts and control over decision-making process.

While aiming to maximize the well-being of today's generation, it is important to take a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences of our actions for our children, their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the resources they will require for their own well-being are not depleted, and that the natural environment into which they will be born will not be polluted or destroyed. Women's contribution to sustainable development, and their skills and ability, must be acknowledged. Women have a strong role in nurturing, educating and socializing their children, including teaching them care, protection and responsibility with regard to the use and protection of natural resources. Taking women's needs, concerns and their knowledge and skills into account will ensure a better understanding of the dynamics in society which create and perpetuate gender inequality and enable policymakers and other agents of change, including employers and civil society organizations, to develop appropriate policy responses and actions. Equally taking part in decision-making and an uniform involvement of both gender at all levels of execution will ensure that women take equal responsibility as men for today's and future generations.

“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their Full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”

(Principle 20, Rio Declaration)

DISCUSSION

To successfully empower women, both gender and empowerment concerns should be integrated into every service provision area. Moreover, they should be incorporated in the economic, political and social spheres as well as at the individual, household and community levels in order to overcome gender inequality and achieve sustainable development.

- Economic empowerment provides incentives to change the patterns of traditional behavior to which a woman is bound as a dependent member of the household. *Women's economic empowerment* sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth that significantly contributes to advancing women empowerment and *sustainable development*.
- Social empowerment of women supports the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life which helps in sustainable development.
- Political Empowerment favors the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance. Women's political empowerment provides access to resources, rights, and entitlements through decision-making powers and due position in governance which gives a significant boost to the position of sustainable development.

Individually women do not have the self-confidence to articulate and assert the power to negotiate and decide. At household level Women were denied the right to education and widow remarriage. They were also denied the right to inheritance and ownership of property. At community level a strong patriarchy society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect women's empowerment. Women share the primary responsibility for nutrition, child care and household management in almost all countries. They are also active in environmental management. 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.

To overcome from these issues, on the one hand women's empowerment needs the building of an enabling environment for the implementation of women's human rights and on the other hand it needs the enhancement of women's skills and capacities as active agents of change for sustainable development.

Suggestions

Attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality. Government needs to work hard to change the existing position of women and achieve gender equality, which will have a positive spillover effect on the sustainable development of the country.

- Empowering women and making full use of their labor force for economic growth.
- Educating and maintaining the health of women to enhance productivity and social development.
- Empowering women and providing them with fair representation across different decision-making levels of the government structure to better protect women's interests and to achieve quality governance.
- Protecting the rights of women to make them active participants in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other arenas thereby bringing about development.
- Empowering women to play an equal role in the protection and management of the environment as the environment is the key source of the country's economy with their special knowledge and expertise.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment is not just a lofty aspiration anymore; it is the necessary missing link for sustainable development. Women, on average, reinvest up to 90% of income into their households. Reducing gender inequality gives women more money to spend on food, housing and education – crucial components for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development. Women's empowerment is important for sustainable development and common future. Reaffirm the commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making. Women should be empowered and gender equality needs to be assured if sustainable development is to succeed. If women can't actively participate in society, half of the world's population is left aside. So for the societies to be successful, we need women's empowerment, gender equality and protection of sexual and

reproductive rights. This way we can enhance sustainable development.

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

-Kofi Annan

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society.

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