



## Indian Journal of Hill Farming

December 2017, Volume 30, Issue 2, Page 341-348

# Role of Gender Equity in Sustainable Development

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received April 2017

Revision Received

Accepted August 2017

*Key words:*

Sustainable development, women, access to resources, rural development, agriculture, education, health

### ABSTRACT

Equity is an essential building block in sustainable development of every sphere of society. Gender analysis is a tool to better understand the realities of the women and men, girls and boys whose lives are impacted by planned development activities. Sustainable development requires the full and equal participation of women at all levels alongside men. It is clearly inappropriate to try and address problems, to identify strategies, or to implement the programmes, if only half of the population (men/women) concerned is involved in the process. Partnerships and equality between men and women are the basis of strong families and viable societies in a rapidly changing world. Women have been consistently excluded from decision-making across history and societies; which resulted imbalance, marginalization, suffering and conflicts. Creating greater gender equity will contribute to building peaceful, democratic and prosperous societies. Even in sustainable development of agriculture, role of women is of paramount importance and there is urgent need to devise women specific technologies for better participation and involvement of women in decision making.

### 1. Introduction

The dynamics of gender differences across a variety of issues include gender perspectives with respect to social relations; activities; access and control over resources, services, institutions of decision-making and networks of power and authority; and the distinct needs of men and women. Sustainable development is the development where men and women, rich and poor move towards a development with equal opportunity in access to food and nutrition, resources, education, health, politics *etc.* Such development also takes care of the optimum utilization of resources, avoids over use and misuse of resources while conserving the rich resource base for the posterity. Thus, sustainable development is a non-negative developmental trend in a manner that there is a balance between environment, ecosystem and development. The principle is that there should be building-up of resource base, the environment and one should be complementary to another, instead of competition *i.e.* sustainable development means

building our communities so that we can live comfortably without consuming all of our resources. Thus, social equity, economic well-being and environmental preservation are the three basic principles of sustainable development (World Summit, 2002). Sustainable development requires the full and equal participation of women at all levels. Women's rights are universal human rights and are protected by international human rights conventions. Also, it is clearly inappropriate to try and address problems, to identify the appropriate strategies, or to implement the solutions if only half of the people concerned are involved in the process. Gender equity is an essential building block in sustainable development. None of the three "pillars" of sustainable development can be achieved without solving the prevailing problem of gender equity, *i.e.*

- **Environmental protection:** This requires a holistic understanding of women's relationship to environmental resources, as well as their rights in resource planning and management.

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- **Economic well-being:** This is an important aspect of sustainable development that requires gender-sensitive strategies. 70% of the world's estimated 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty are women (Haq, 1997). Economic well-being of any society cannot be achieved if one group is massively underprivileged compared to the other.
- **Social equity:** The third pillar of sustainable development is social equity. This is fundamentally linked to gender equity. No society can survive sustainability, or allow its members to live in dignity, if there is prejudice and discrimination of any social group.

## 2. Gender equity

Gender refers to the attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the socio-cultural relationships between women and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially evolved and are learned through socialization processes. They are situation and context specific and changeable. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in activities undertaken, access to and control over resources as well as participation and opportunities in decision making. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context which also takes into consideration factors such as class, race, economic status, ethnic group and age. Gender equity is to understand how men and women participate in a developmental activity, what is the rights, access and environmental security of men and women, is there any discrimination in placement, wages, promotion *etc.* Gender issue is not exactly the women issues. It is placing the issues in right perspectives while giving equal opportunity to men and women. The UN Millennium Declaration (2000) commits the member countries "to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable". One of the 8 UN Millennium Declarations (2000) includes "Promote gender equality and empower women". Therefore, without empowering women, the goal of Millennium Declaration can't be achieved.

### 2.1. Why do gender analysis?

Information is essential to gender mainstreaming at all levels from the formulation of national legislation and policy, to the planning and monitoring of specific interventions. For use in the planning of livelihoods interventions, information from a gender analysis will be useful in order to understand the needs, constraints to participation, ability to participate and different benefits from

participation to men and women in particular livelihoods interventions. Despite overall declines in maternal mortality, women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centres (UNDP, 2013). Women's share of parliamentary seats has risen, but only modestly. Some countries still have no female political representatives and, among the remainder, few have achieved gender parity. The global ratio rose from 12.7% in 1997 to 26.2% by 2011 (UNDP, 2013). As of January 2017, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is 23.3%. The sharing of economic and political opportunities is important instrument for economic growth and development (UNDP, 2013). In spite of the fact that almost 40% of the world labour force are women but they hold just 1% of world wealth. Salaried women workers earn 62 cents for every \$1 that men earn in Germany, 64 cents in India and about 80 cents in Mexico and Egypt. Women entrepreneurs fare far worse, earning 34 cents for every \$1 men earn in Ethiopia and just 12 cents in Bangladesh relative to every \$1 for men (World Bank, 2011).

'Women are about half of the world's population, yet they do 2/3 of the world work, earn 1/10th of the world's income and own hardly 1% of the world's property reported by World Bank (HEC Global learning Centre). However, factual evidence for these data couldn't be ascertained from available data and hence, its much debated. Nevertheless, it's an accepted fact that property and income receipt by the women are much less than man, hence, there is inequality. Women are also disadvantaged when it comes to decision-making responsibilities and senior management positions; by the time you get to the boardroom, there are only 10 women for every 100 men (OECD, 2012). India has ranked 125 of 159 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a value of 0.53 (UNHDR, 2016). At all levels there is less/meagre participation of women. The participation is still bleak in weaker and marginalized sections of the society. In North Eastern Region of India especially in hills most of the household activities including agricultural activities are performed by the women. In spite of the lot of awareness in education, access to resources, health, environmental security *etc.* women are always given least priority. Abortion of girl fetus is still a common phenomenon. "Save Girl Child" movement of the Government and other initiatives are of course some of the positive steps for giving dignitary to women and equity in the society. It is actually inappropriate to talk about any sustainable development without full and equal participation of women. An account of status of women in various aspects of societal development in Tripura state has been earlier reported (Chakroborty and Bandyopadhyay). Gender analysis draws on the understanding that each development situation is unique and contextual. No other individual, family, village or nation has the same set of resources to manage with the

same people, in the same time frame, or with the same constraints in same boundary. Women's work and men's work differ from place to place and examining gender roles in each specific development context will help to avoid programme failure. Development initiatives which aim to improve the livelihood of local people must take into account gender based divisions of labour, gender-based access to resources and control over those resources. Otherwise, decisions will be based on mistaken assumptions. Gender-disaggregated information also reveals what women and men are aware of and what they actually need. Women and men are both sources of valuable cultural knowledge and sustainable resource management practices, but each may be knowledgeable about different species and practices, according to their activities. Building on local knowledge is a way to enhance any development programme success.

Planning for people-centred development requires precise information about who the people are. They are not a homogeneous group. The people include both women and men. The poor are poor women and poor men. The children are girls and boys. Everywhere, and within every socio-economic group, the lives of females and males are structured in fundamentally different ways. A gender-based division of labour is universal; but it differs by culture, geographic location and socio-economic group. It is recognized that gender is only one of many important social characteristics – along with ethnicity, race, caste, class, age and occupation. Whatever their class or ethnicity, women and men have different roles, responsibilities, resources, constraints and opportunities – because of gender. Therefore, information is not precise enough for developmental programme planning unless it is disaggregated by gender. This includes information about women and men's specific demand activities.

## ***2.2. Attitude of men towards women's role***

The sole occupation of women is assumed to be to bear children, take care of house hold activities, to look after her husband, otherwise to drudge for the household activities. Not only is the woman condemned to domestic slavery but when she goes as laborer to earn wages, though she works harder than the man, she is paid less. It is a mystery why even in the most developed society women are undervalued and their concerns are seen as managerial and peripheral (Mahatma Gandhi, 1918). However, these attitudes are changing very fast in developing and developed countries. Women are now taking part and even lead in each and every social, political and developmental activities including in

arm forces. Much more need to be done to achieve target of Millennium Development Goal.

## ***2.3. Gender analysis - access to resources***

Gender analysis concepts tend to be often controversial because they raise sensitive issues. Visual tools have been found to be very effective in getting both men and women to focus on gender concerns without feeling threatened. Gender analysis of access to resources is a technique that can provide insights into whether a development intervention has had a gender differentiated impact on the access to and control of domestic and community resources. The process of conducting the exercise with community members also helps to raise their awareness about these issues. The technique can be used as part of a group discussion involving both men and women. If the women are to feel comfortable and express themselves freely, however, in many cultures it will be preferable and perhaps even necessary, to meet separately with the women and men (Shyiem, NEN). The technique uses three large drawings of a man, a woman, and a couple as well as a set of cards showing different resources and possessions owned by people in the community, including, for example, cattle, currency, furniture, radio, food, animals, huts, jewellery, water pots and so on. Participants then assign the resources to the man, woman, or couple, depending on who works with particular physical and community resources and who owns or makes decisions about them.

## ***3. The current situation***

Global statistics place women behind men in relation to health, education, nutrition levels, political participation, legal rights, equal pay for equal work, amongst many others aspects of life. Some important aspects are –

### ***3.1. Poverty elimination***

Globally, at least 1.3 billion people are living in absolute poverty and 70% of these are women. (Haq, 1997). Extreme poverty, often associated with gender discrimination, is also casually linked to the deaths of millions of women and girls every year. Women earn less, work in the lowest paid jobs, and receive fewer benefits. Gender equality and its links to poverty (Table 1) have been described by World Bank (2002). The current world food price crisis is having a severe impact on women. A significant percentage of women eat only once a day around the world. Many women deny themselves even that one meal to ensure that their children are fed. These women are already suffering from severe malnutrition.

### 3.2. Health

A key driver for sustainable development is the maintenance of good health. However, women in developing countries and poor communities are often the last to receive necessary care and attention. Universal rights and access to care, partnership in reproductive health and education can improve this sector substantially. One third of the increase in male and female life expectancy between 1960 and 1990 are attributable to improvements in education for women (UN, 2001). Life expectancy levels have improved in women faster than men due to various health and education programme by international communities and governments (Soares, 2007). However, there are still several health issues which need to be addressed globally and locally. In 2000, 1.3 million women died of AIDS and over 16.4 million are currently living with HIV/AIDS.

Of those infected with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa, 55% are women. Teenage girls are 5 times more likely to be infected than boys of the same age (Jewkes, 2010). The majority of the world's women and girls do not have the right to a clean and safe environment due to exposure to second-hand smoke. Lung cancer now outranks breast cancer in the United States as the leading cause of cancer deaths among women. Average fertility has dropped from 4.7 children in 1970 to 3 in 1990-1995. Over half of women of childbearing age use modern contraceptive methods. However, nearly 6 lakh women die every year (over 1,600 everyday) from complications with pregnancy or delivery, the vast majority in the developing world. Nearly 1 lakh maternal deaths are the result of 20 million unsafe abortions that occur every year. Globally about 80 million pregnancies are unwanted or unplanned (WHO, 2004). The fifth United Nations Millennium Development Goal recommends a 75% reduction in maternal mortality by 2015 (Haddad, 2009).

**Table 1.** Gender issues and potential interventions for sustainable development

<b>Dimension of poverty</b>	<b>Gender differentiated barriers</b>	<b>Potential interventions</b>	<b>Development indicators</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender difference in the impact of economic downturns</li> <li>• Unequal access to labour markets</li> <li>• Unequal access to productive assets</li> <li>• Pay discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting economic growth</li> <li>• Equal access to labour</li> <li>• Access to productive assets</li> <li>• Reducing women's travel and time burden</li> </ul>	Improved economic conditions
<b>Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal access to education</li> <li>• Unequal access to health</li> <li>• Limited access to water and energy</li> <li>• Vulnerability to civil and domestic violence</li> <li>• Vulnerability to environmental risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to education</li> <li>• Access to health</li> <li>• Access to water and energy</li> </ul>	Enhanced human capital and quality of life
<b>Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerability to economic risk</li> <li>• Vulnerability to natural disasters</li> <li>• Vulnerability to civil and domestic violence</li> <li>• Vulnerability to environmental risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping poor women and men manage risk</li> <li>• Manage economic crisis and natural disaster</li> <li>• Protection from civil and domestic violence</li> </ul>	Greater economic and physical security
<b>Empowerment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions not accessible to poor women and men</li> <li>• Lack of voice in local and national politics</li> <li>• Limited voice in community decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making institution more responsive to poor women and men</li> <li>• Removing barriers to political participation for women and men.</li> <li>• Empowering women and men to demand accountability from institutions</li> </ul>	Increased political participation and gender equity

**Source:** (Hemmati and Gardiner, 2002, UNED, Towards Earth Summit, Social Briefing no. 2. UNIFEM; The United Nations Development Fund for Women, [www.undp.org/unifem](http://www.undp.org/unifem))

### 3.3. Education

The female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate as many parents do not allow their female children to go to schools. They get married off at a young age instead. Though child marriage has been lowered to very low levels, it still happens. Many families, especially in rural areas believe that having a male child is better than having a baby girl. So the male child gets all the benefits. In 2011 census of India, the female literacy was 65.46% against 80% for male in India. The global literacy rate for all people aged 15 and above is 86.3%. The global literacy rate for all males is 90.0% and the rate for all females is 82.7%. Over 75% of the world's 781 million illiterate adults are found in South Asia, West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and women represent almost two-thirds of all illiterate adults globally (World Factbook). Improving women education can reduce malnutrition by as high as 43% (Fig 1), followed by food availability (23%) and health environment (20%) (Smith and Haddad, 2000). Girls' enrolment in primary and secondary schools has increased from 38% to 68% between 1970 and 1990 in world. But girls account for 60% of the 130 million children without access to primary education (UNDP, 1995). World Bank surveys in Kenya, suggested that if women's education were raised to the same level as men, food crop yields would increase by 9-22%, and as much as 25% increase if they were guaranteed primary education (World Bank 2001).

The international community has identified the following

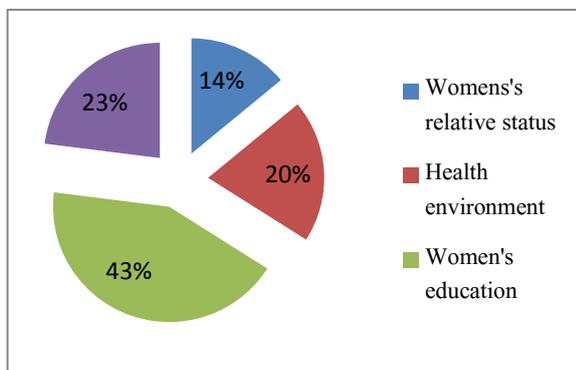


Figure 1. Impact of women education on reducing malnutrition (Smith and Haddad, 2000)

priority issues to provide an important framework for achieving gender equality in sustainable development.

- Women's human rights and control over their lives
- Poverty eradication
- Women's access to control and management of resources and services
- The impacts of globalization
- Finance for development

- Health, including reproductive and environmental health

### 4. Why is gender essential to the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources?

Gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice and a pre-condition for sustainable development. In the use, management and conservation of natural resources women and men have different roles and responsibilities, which vary greatly from region to region (Fig 2). Women often make their contributions to the family, community and society with unequal access to, control over and benefits from resources and resource use. This inequality often exists in a context of discrimination and unequal power relationships.



Plate 2. Women perform majority of the works, walks miles to collect fire woods, water and other daily needs

### 5. Challenges for gender equity and some solutions

The range of women/gender and sustainable development issues is much wider; in fact, the majority of sustainable development issues need a gender mainstreaming approach.

#### 5.1. Human rights and conflict

The right to life, equality, dignity and freedom are human rights. Violence against women causes more deaths and disabilities among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war (World Bank Discussion Paper no. 255). Violence towards women is often greater in situations of conflict.

#### 5.2. Gender and human security

The consequences of conflict for communities are enormous, affecting women, children, the elderly and the disabled the most. Civilian victims, often outnumber casualties among

combatants. Women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society. Among the increasing numbers of refugees and involuntary displaced people the majority are women, adolescent girls and children.

### **5.2.1. Culture of peace**

Women's commitment to peace remains critical to ensuring the durability of peace and effective implementation of peace agreements.

### **5.2.2. Participation, training and education**

Women's full participation in peace keeping, military structures, conflict resolution, reconstruction and development is crucial.

### **5.2.3. Mainstreaming gender**

A gender perspective is needed in all politics and programmes for peace building, relief and rehabilitation programmes. Before military and peace-keeping decisions are taken, analysis should be made of the differing impacts on women and men, respectively.

### **5.3. Poverty and development**

The Human Development Report (HDR) in 1995 said that *poverty has a women's face*, (Haq 1997). The economic inequality between men and women is widening. And whilst globalization has brought some women greater economic opportunities and autonomy, it has further marginalized others. Institutions need to do substantially more to meet these problems. The HDR precisely explained "*Human development, if not engendered, is endangered*".

### **5.4. Gender and work**

Women make essential contributions to economic development and household income. Independent income of women improves gender relations as much as it helps ensure survival in cases of male migration, separation or widowhood. However, all too often women go under-recognized and underpaid. A study in Bangladesh villages found average women work almost 12 hours a day, as compared to 8-10 hours for men in the same villages. In Africa, women do 90 % of the work of gathering water and wood, for the household and for food preparation (FAO, 2001). For better involvement of women technologies that are easy to operate by the women should be promoted to reduce drudgery of women, release time for alternative activities, and promote labour efficiency and sustained household income.

The unequal division of labour and inequitable workloads are central issues to be considered in development policies and programmes. By addressing them, through labour-saving technologies and other activities, the pro-poor impact of economic interventions such as value chain development, rural finance and agricultural extension is strengthened (Oxfam, 2015).

### **5.5. Gender and environment**

As women are poorer than men in most societies, they suffer the most from a lack of basic necessities. Moreover, the lower the income of women the less rights they tend to have as consumers. Poor women are less likely to be illiterate making them vulnerable to unethical practices such as higher prices and fraudulent services.

### **5.6. Participation**

Increasing woman's participation has not been a priority in many countries. It has remained limited to a minority of woman who hold decision –making positions. The UN has designated 30% as the 'critical mass' required maintaining the impetus towards equal 50/50 representation.

### **5.7. Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming policies and procedural rules need to be integrated into the work of all governments and adequate monitoring mechanisms should be established to achieve sustainable development

## **6. Women at work: overview of different sectors (ILO, 2001)**

### **6.1. Agriculture**

Women make up 51% of the agricultural labour force worldwide but in many countries, women's extensive contribution to agricultural output remains largely unrecorded. In Sub-Saharan Africa 80% of economically active women are working in the agricultural sector. In India, the typical work of the female agricultural laborer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, that often fit well within the framework of domestic life and child-rearing. According to United Nations Human Development Report only 32.8% of Indian women formally participate in the labor force, a rate that has remained steady since 2009 statistics. By comparison men constitute 81.1% (UNHDR, 2011).

## 6.2. Public service

Many governments claim there is no gender discrimination in public services, and indeed the public sector is the largest employer of women. However, most women work is clerical jobs and few enter middle or top-management positions. Promotion in the public service depends mainly on seniority, to detriment of workers with family responsibilities who need career breaks. Eg. A woman needs to go for leaves like maternity leave, child care leave and so many other leaves, which affect their career.

## 6.3. Education

Women teachers and trainers make up the majority in primary and secondary education. Where they are in the minority like in Africa and South Asia, and in technical education, increasing recruitment of female teachers will have a direct bearing on female access to education and career development.

## 7. Strategies for ensuring gender equality

Key actions include abolishing school fees and encouraging parents and communities to invest in girls' education, right to education of Government of India is the right step in this front. Mid-day meal programme not only promote education of poor childrens especially girls but also ensures minimum health of child. However, such programme are to be implemented by many countries around the world. Investment to eliminate gender discrimination must be integrated into government budgets and plans. National legislation in property law and inheritance rights should ensure a level playing field for women, alongside measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence in conflict. Legislative interventions are a proven method of ensuring women's participation in politics. Of the 20 countries with the most women in parliament, 17 use some form of legislation to ensure and promote participation of women in politics (UNICEF, 2007). India has been moving towards this with the introduction of various bills in parliament and legislative assemblies time to time. Grassroots women's movements have been vocal champions for equality and empowerment and should be involved in the early stages of policy formation so that programmes are designed with the needs of women and children in mind. Educating men and boys, as well as women and girls, on the benefits of gender equality, joint decision-making, developing and promoting women leadership for addressing issues related to gender sensitiveness and gender experts in colleges and universities for balance and equitable development and growth are some of the feasible options.

## 8. Other issues to be addressed for empowering women

1. Training increases the efficiency of women and men in doing the work timely and properly. They should be trained to develop their capabilities of decision-making and individual thinking.
2. There is a need to change the attitude and perception of male members towards the women. Male members of the family should come forward to share the burden and responsibility in indoor and outdoor activities with women.
3. Women should also get the quality food to maintain their health, so that they can effectively contribute in social development.
4. Socio-cultural norms and taboos should be removed to provide women more freedom and facilities to work optimally.
5. Information technology to be strengthened in the village itself for making more access to the women farmer. It will help in getting the information timely and accurately for adequate decision making and planning activities related to agriculture and other sectors. .
6. Better medical facility needed for improvement in the health of women.
7. Small scale industries like agro-industries should be established for processing of agricultural produce and promotion of small scale house-hold level industries.
8. More employment opportunities should be generated in all development fields. There should be equal wages for men and women.
9. Devising women specific farm tools and machineries for ensuring involvement of women in agricultural development. Hill agriculture will need different approach than those of plain farming activities.
10. Women extension workers should be recruited for facilitating the women farmers' for timely providing information related to basic fields like agriculture, health *etc.*
11. Women self-help group should be promoted for participation in development and livelihood activities *etc.*
12. Better medical facility needed for improvement in the health of women.
13. Small scale industries should be established for processing at household level.
14. Harassment and exploitation of women in home and outside should be checked. Socio-economic gender approach may be used to solve the gender issues.
15. Technology evolved should be socially acceptable, economically viable, drudgery reducing and gender need based.
16. Participatory approach for solving of gender issues should be adapted.

## Conclusions

A society or a nation can't progress unless all section of its population takes part in development. In a country like India with above one 1.32 billion population with almost 0.65 billion women it is important that women takes part in all developmental activities including agriculture and rural development programmes. Education and awareness is the first step in that direction. Recent bill of right to education is an appropriate step in this regard. It's true that starting from pre-independence era to recent past and in present day's women have given enough examples that given the right opportunity they can prove themselves in all fields starting from battle fields to science, management to politics. What is required is to put the things in right perspectives and give equal opportunity to all sections of people irrespective of gender, caste and creed to move towards sustainable development. Similar approaches are also required for sustainable development of agriculture with special emphasis on food security and rural livelihood.

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