

Women empowerment and Sustainable development

CS (DR.) S K GUPTA, MD & CEO, IPA OF INSTITUTE OF COST ACCOUNTANTS OF INDIA

CMA (DR.) NANDITA MISHRA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, AMITY COLLEGE OF COMMERCE AND FINANCE

It is impossible to make a universal vision of sustainable development become a reality, when half of humanity's voices are being disregarded at decision-making tables.

THE PERSPECTIVE

Women, who make up half of the world's population, have benefited more than men from the progress in economic and social development in the last three decades. Nevertheless they continue to be overrepresented among the world's most vulnerable groups, as access to resources and power remains highly skewed towards men. Gender equality is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. 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 to ensure that women's and men's interests are both taken into account in the allocation of resources

Gender equality is a fundamental human right which involves almost half of the human population. It therefore matters as a crucial development objective itself. However, gender equality is not only a goal which calls to be accomplished, it is also a key driver to achieve progress in a number of development issues from poverty reduction to environmental sustainability. Quoting Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General Gender "equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance". Gender inequality is a cause for concern worldwide. Realization of women's potential is an essential driver not only for economic growth but for achieving full sustainable development, both for the current generation as well as future ones. To have sustainable development in the true sense, it is necessary to empower the women. Only by empowering the makers of the society can we actually have a developed society, a society which can think and work collaboratively towards achieving sustainability.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ?

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. Sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It therefore summarizes the needs of both

women and men.

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 be 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. Sustainable development should be a key principle of all national 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. This will bring harmony 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.

WHAT IS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment can be defined as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment in context of women means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. Women empowerment can be conceptualized as an important process in reaching gender equality. Gender equality 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 United Nations Population Fund an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth. She can regulate her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with a range 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)

"We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored." Sheryl Sandberg. On the one hand women's empowerment needs the building of an enabling environment for the implementation of women's human rights. On the other hand it needs the enhancement of women's skills and capacities as active agents of change for sustainable development. In failing to make the best use of their female populations, most countries are underinvesting in the human capital needed to assure sustainability

Gender bias is still deeply embedded in cultures, economies, political and social institutions around the world. Women and girls face unacceptable levels of discrimination and abuse, which is not only wrong, but also prevents them from playing a full part in society and decision-making. Worldwide, however, women are prevented from achieving their full potential. A new report by the World Bank shows the numerous legal barriers that women face that hinder their productivity. Women face job restrictions in 100 of 173 countries monitored. For example, in 29 nations they are prohibited from working at night. Only half of the countries had paternity leave, limiting men's ability to share child care responsibilities. Such laws are detrimental to women, their children, and the societies (and economies) in which they live.

Although the female presence in the workplace is growing, women do not yet share in economic and political leadership. Among Fortune 500 companies, women are only three percent of CEOs, six percent of top managers and 15 percent of board members. Studies by Catalyst, McKinsey and other groups indicate that firms with more women in leadership positions tend to have better performance and higher profits. But women remain on the sidelines even though their "risksmart" approaches, people skills and leadership strengths are sorely needed in business and government.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN DRIVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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.

(Principle 20, Rio Declaration) "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-centred 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" (OSAGI 2001)

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. A dual approach of positive action and gender mainstreaming is most beneficial to creating an enabling environment for women. This refers first to dedicated policies and programs which explicitly aim at improving women's situations, and second, to taking a gender-sensitive approach across all policies and programs which do not have women's empowerment as their primary purpose.

Create an enabling environment Women's empowerment requires an enabling and supportive environment. This includes removing the obstacles and barriers to equal participation and rewards for women.

Creating an enabling environment encompasses action at all levels: relevant legal reforms and policy measures at the government and municipality levels, as well as initiatives and support by the private sector, civil society, family and friends. The need for a gender-sensitive approach across all policy areas.

WOMEN AND FAMILY

Women and Men 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. As the primary caregivers and educators of the next generation, women give greater emphasis to the role of communications and education in mitigating climate change. Women's responsibilities in households and communities, as stewards of natural and household resources, positions them well to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities. 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.

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. 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.

WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

In terms of resource impacts, women tend to leave a smaller ecological footprint than men due to their more sustainable consumption patterns. Sustainable consumption is using resources in a way that minimises harm to the environment while supporting the well-being of people. Men's lifestyles and consumer patterns, whether they are rich or poor, tend to be more resource-intensive and less sustainable than women's (Johnsson-Latham, 2006). Impressing a more feminine footprint would result in a smaller impact on the environment as well as better access to goods and services that take into account the needs of both women and men.

What is termed "women's consumption" of household goods and services is more often representative of family consumption as a whole. Women are responsible for activities such as shopping, food preparation, gift-buying, and disposal of used items. Women spend more than men on consumer goods, including in the categories of hygiene, medical care and health, clothing and shoes, books and culture. Men are more likely to eat out than women, consume more alcohol and tobacco, and spend more on transport.

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

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. The most basic and important premise for women's empowerment is peace and the absence of violence, including domestic violence. Infrastructure developments in transportation as well as urban planning, which takes into account the safety and mobility needs of women, are important factors enabling women to move around freely. Safe and affordable transport enables women to fully participate in economic activities as well as in community life and plays an important role in broadening access to health and education opportunities. They play a critical role in bringing about changes in attitudes and encouraging the adoption of greener lifestyles and climate-friendly values by their children. More education about climate change, its causes and ways to avoid it for all age groups is among the steps they advocate. Women themselves would like to know more about the science and technology of climate change, indicating a role for better training in this area.

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. 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 labor 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. 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.

CONCLUSION

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 programs 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. It has been proven time and again, that empowering women helps drive economic growth and development across the board, and everyone in the world should be committed to achieving this. Gender data has to become a necessary ingredient of all data collection process such that not only women are able to reap the benefits of the various developmental programs, but also contribute effectively to development.

As indicated by both theory and evidence, 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. Sustainable development is a political concept because it is about good governance, which will be hard to achieve until we get closer to gender parity. Research is needed to test the hypothesis that women are more risk-averse than men and that women leaders would be more apt to follow sustainable development pathways. Given the importance of gender to sustainability, these issues should feature more prominently in sustainable development discussions and be highlighted in a 2012 UN Conference on Sustainability Development.

Women Empowerment

CS FALGUNI ARORA

India is very famous for its cultural heritage, traditions, civilization, religion and graphical features from the ancient times. It is also popular as a male prejudicated nation. Women are given first priority in India however earlier they are badly treated in the family and society. They were limited only for the household chores or to understand the responsibility of home and family members. They were kept totally unaware of their rights and self development. People of India call this country as "BHARAT-MATA" however they never realized the true meaning of it. BHARAT-MATA means mother of every Indian whom we have to save and care for always.

Some Women in India are subjected to honour killings and they are never given their basic rights of proper education and freedom. They are the victims who have to face violence and abuse in the dominated country. According to the National Mission for the Empowerment

of Women (NMEW) launched by the Government, the objective is to strengthen the processes that promote holistic development of women, gender equality and gender justice through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes impacting women, forging synergy amongst various stakeholders and creating an enabling environment conducive to social change. It will also strive to integrate gender concerns into the training curriculum of the training institutes (administrative, academic, police, legal, health, skill development, rural development etc.) as well as prepare training modules for functionaries at various levels. It would also undertake research, evaluation and reviews of programmes and legislation, gender audit and outcome assessment to build evidence for policy intervention and programmatic reform. The ratio of female sex and female literacy both have increased. Women empowerment needs to take full speed in right direction instead of being in emerging stage.