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DOI: http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.55

A GENDER RESPONSIVE APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT- IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5 AND ITS MULTIPLIER EFFECT

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Abstract

In 2015, United Nations General Assembly compiled a comprehensive agenda for sustainable development entitled- "Transforming our world: a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The agenda comprises of 17 goals (abbreviated as SDGs i.e. Sustainable Development Goals) and 169 targets and aims at developing and improving the economic, environmental and social dimensions. These SDGs are the blueprint to achieve more sustainability and create better living conditions for all. The essence of the agenda is 'dignity and equality' applicable globally. Gender equality has always been an unfinished business of UN and of the world and is not limited to the empowerment or emancipation of women and girls from all sorts of discrimination, violence and inequalities but is something much larger as it benefits all human irrespective of the gender.

This paper exclusively covers SDG5- Gender equality because of its multiplier effects on other SDGs. The paper attempts to demonstrate how achievement of gender equality is essential for other (if not all) SDGs to be attained. Achievement of gender equality and empowering all women and girls are decisive factor in transforming the vision (sustainable development) into a reality and is necessary to lay peaceful, universal and sustainable foundations.

Keywords: Discrimination, Empowerment, Gender Equality, Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Introduction

Women make up half of the population of the world and somewhat are neglected and treated differently than the other half of the population. The issue of gender inequality and discrimination has always been a globally challenging phenomenon prevailing in societies irrespective of religion, caste, race, economy and others. It has been practiced and tolerated since one can remember and will continue to exist in futures to come if not resolved. At present, world is faced by conflict, extremism, environmental degradation and the most affected and vulnerable ones are women and girls largely because of the fact that men and women have different life chances and opportunities by virtue of their sex.

Gender equality has been enshrined as a human right in a number of declarations and conventions, including the Rio+20 outcome document "The Future We Want", the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which offers a comprehensive description of this right (MONTREAL PROTOCOL PROJECT, 2015). In 2015, in United Nations General Assembly, a comprehensive agenda for sustainable development was agreed by 193 member countries entitled- "Transforming our world: a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The agenda comprises of 17 goals and 169 targets that are to be achieved by 2030. These goals have been guided using a gendered lens, as gender equality has always been the unfinished business of United Nations and that of the world. Thus, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims at bringing forth gender equality at global scale via 5 achievable goals that are to be measured and accessed using 6 targets laid down in the agenda. Though the realization of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is important, in this paper I will discuss SDG5 mentioned in the 2030 agenda entitled- "**Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls**" because of its multiplier effect on the other SDGs.

Literature Review

Candice Stevens, in her work- "Are women the key to Sustainable development?", states that the economic, environmental and social crisis taking place at the global scale results in the sluggish attainment of gender equality or is it vice-versa. According to her, the negligence of the social factor particularly gender equality will lead to economic and environmental development which will benefit only the few mostly men. The existing gender inequality is the reason behind high economic costs in the attainment of sustainable development. There are three main pillars of sustainable development- Economic, Social and environmental and she in her work has made a comprehensive connection between these three pillars and gender equality affecting one another. While addressing economic pillar she states that the pillar has cracks as one section of the gender is at disadvantage due to existing male- work models, lack of adequate childcare, lesser or fewer women in top positions. Similarly, in the social pillar, the women face many deprivations such as indifferent attitudes towards them resulting into wage gaps, preponderance to male employees and inaccessibility or



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restrictions towards economic resources etc. and lastly, the failure to make women the part of decision-making processes in the protection of environment as women are more likely practice recycling, eco-labeling and use energy efficient products compared to men. The underlying message to the above-mentioned facts are not economic, social and environmental development tends to be lopsided when the “other gender” is still lacking behind resulting into disproportionate and disoriented sustainable development benefitting only few.

The brief work on “Gender and Environment” gathered on Gender Tool Box, states that gender norm have an impact on people interacting with the environment. Women being subordinate to men due to laid down gender power relations, they are often overlooked. The work states that the interaction of the two genders with the environment is not same because of the rules and norms laid down by the society appropriating each gender. For instance, women are more involved in household waste management because of the role they play as home makers. Similarly, water issue is a women’s issue as the management of water is a women’s duty. Whatever be the “duty and responsibilities”, women are keener and more efficient than men in the management of these aspects and therefore protectors and managers of the environment.

Gender, environment and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, released by United Nations ESCAP, advocates that gender- environment intersectionality is key to have an accelerated advancement of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Women function as a catalyst to sustainable development by playing various roles in economic, social and environmental spheres. For example- women account for 84% of workers engaged in fisheries and aquaculture. However, most of her contributions go “invisible”. Similarly, the protection and conservation of the forests already affected by deforestation are well managed and done by women which often goes unrecognized. According to this work released by ESCAP, policies should be implemented to make women a part of development, recognize their contributions and safeguard them from future possibilities of inequalities if development is to be made sustainable.

INTER-RELATION BETWEEN SDG5 AND OTHER SDGS

Below an attempt has been made to connect the inter linkages of SDG5 with other SDGs.

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG1 [Gender Equality and No poverty (End poverty in all its forms everywhere)]
The aim of SDG1 is to eradicate poverty of any form from every corner of the earth.

Target 1.1 and 1.2 of SDG1, aims at eradication of poverty for all people everywhere and reduction of poverty at least by half proportion respectively.

On an average, poverty-stricken population live on less than 1.25\$ per day and the worst affected are women and girl children as they make up majority of dependent population, some throughout their lifetime. Some reasons behind are early child marriage, forced marriage and also since most women and girls are engaged in informal economic and social sectors where their labour (physical or nonphysical) is not economically appreciated.

Similarly, on an average woman earn 24% less than men even if equal labour is invested by both the genders. Thus, to ensure the fulfillment of target 1.1 and 1.2, it is essential to first attain the gender equality which aims at eradicating discrimination towards women of any kind including wage discrimination, elimination of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and economic appreciation of unpaid labour provided by women especially as caretakers respectively.

- Target 1.3 of SDG1 aims at implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all.....the poor and vulnerable.

Statistically speaking, more women drop out of work or don’t work or do not pursue their desired work sector due to absence or satisfactory safe and better work environments. Prevalence of “male work model” in almost all sectors makes women difficult to work as they are “required” to be flexible and balance home and work. Absence of proper paid maternity leaves and absence of child care facilities in their working institutes make woman to drop from their works and engage in child rearing responsibilities. Thus, for target 1.3 to be fully functionally, protection of women from any sort of discrimination be it wage or work place discrimination and economic appreciation of unpaid labour by women as care takers especially child care takers is of utmost importance.



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- Target 1.4 aims at ensuring “equal rights to economic resources.....ownership and control over land...property inheritance....appropriate technology”.

Not all and here all refers to women enjoy equal property rights. In most countries women still do not have inheritance right and if they inherit father’s property, after marriage is owned by their spouse. Thus, to ensure poverty eradication, women have to be given equal access to property rights. Similarly, women do not have equal access to economic resources using which they can have economic levitation. Thus, this target of SDG1 is intimately SDG5 which targets at formulating “sound policies and enforceable legislation for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls” and “undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources.... control over land...in accordance with national laws” which needs to be achieved or implemented at first hand.

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG2 [Gender equality and Zero Hunger (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture)]

If we analyze a bigger picture, we find that accessibility to food and gender equality is closely connected. About 60% of women and girls make up most of the under nourished population of the world. This can largely be attributed to the discrimination between the genders practiced in families and societies as a “tradition” laid down in one’s culture.

- Target 2.1 aims at “.... safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round”.
In rural areas, we find women play a major role as producers, processor and maker of food for all in the family and similarly in urban areas as managers if not producers, processor and maker. Though they play major role in food production, they are often the last one to eat and that is the reason why it is said ‘women often eat last’. It is also seen at times when there is shortage of food at home, women or to be specific mothers makes sacrifices for others. These kinds of practices are often traditions that are brought into existence through the society defined gendered roles where men have to be engaged in capital production and it is the duty of the women to feed them. Thus, if one is to end hunger, gender-based discrimination on food accessibility has to end first.
- Target 2.2 “..... address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating mothers...”
Adolescent girls require more nutritional food as they undergo menstruation cycle each month during which they are physically weak and are prone to sickness and related physical illness. In addition to it girls are more likely to be anemic than boys, thus a nutritious food is required for their healthy growth. Similarly, as the saying goes ‘eating for two’, pregnant women require more nutritional food as what she eats directly determines the health condition of herself and a child to be born. Malnutrition or under nutrition of a pregnant women is often a cause behind high maternity rates and infant mortality rates. Lastly, nutritious food is of utmost important for lactating mother, as they not only contribute in making them healthy physically and mentally but also aids in better milk production.
- ❖ SDG5 and SDG3 [Gender equality and good health and wellbeing (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages)]
- Target 3.1 aims to “By 2030 reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births”
According to WHO, everyday 830 women die due to pregnancy related complications and mostly found in lower income countries. The high maternity rate is largely attributed to- inaccessibility to nutritious and healthy food required for good physical and mental health, early marriage resulting into early pregnancy which risks the life and health of both mother and child, inaccessibility to basic medical facilities due to financial constraints, poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water, unhygienic living conditions leading to spread of diseases and other sickness that hampers the immune system of pregnant women. Social environment also plays a major factor in the health of pregnant women as it causes psychological and mental distress which has an adverse effect on their physical health.

To eliminate the above factors and ensure health well- being of a women and especially pregnant women, women should be freed from any kind of violence and discrimination both at home and work place. Similarly, women have to be given equal accessibility to resources like food, health care, freedom to take decision regarding their health wellbeing, and ensure them to enjoy their reproductive rights and freedoms.



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- Target 3.7 aim to “By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes”

Sexual violence towards women and girls are at higher rates leading to unwanted pregnancies, chances of getting STDs, HIV and other sexual diseases and medical condition. Sex education is most important to spread knowledge to both the genders at early ages. Family planning should also be made available to both the genders with more focus on women and girls and provide knowledge about pre and post pregnancy situation in order to avoid negligence which can put lives at risk. Act of female genital mutilation is still practiced by certain groups and needs special attention. Also dissipate knowledge regarding various rights and services provided by the governments and other institutes which can provide help during a crisis. Proper and safe sanitations are also to be provided as reproductive track diseases are more common in women than men.

- Target 3.8- “Achieve universal health coverage..... quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.”

Sexual and reproductive health coverage and insurance should be provided so that women and girls can have financial security during the hour of need. Women should be able to access essential medicines such as contraceptive pills without any social prejudices. Sanitary pads should be at affordable price is if not free. Thus, overall, we see that in order to have good health and wellbeing for all, first gender equality is important as half the population is still living and surviving in worse and unsatisfactory health conditions and services are made unapproachable due to prejudices that follow.

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG4 [Gender equality and Quality Education (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all)]

Why gender equality is needed in order to ensure quality education for all and also promotion of learning opportunities for all? The notion- man as ‘bread earners and women as ‘bread makers’, has led to the tradition of giving more emphasis upon boys’ education than girls. Boys or men are expected to be the financial heads and controllers of the family while girls or women as the house makers. Thus, families give more emphasis on the education of boy child than girl child. Though at present, the conscious stricken families/parents, irrespective of gender give equal emphasis when it comes to education yet, not all comes under this preview. Early child marriage is another reason for low literacy among girls. In most rural areas and also seen in urban areas, the existing dowry system forces parents to save money for marriage therefore spends less in girls’ education. In most cases, girls have to be engaged in domestic chores alongside their schooling which discourages them in their studies resulting in more number of failures; drop outs and also discourages to take higher education. Intervening obstacles to girls and women to travel/ migrate for higher education also hampers the education.

All in all, gender equality is required to provide education for all so that provision of education to girls does not require second thought and processing and frees parents and families.

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG6 [Gender equality and Clean Water and Sanitation (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all)]

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognized access to ‘safe water and sanitation’ as human rights. However, in 2021, according to WHO/ UNICEF report, still

2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water while 3.6 billion people lack proper sanitation. There is a famous saying- “water issue is a women’s issue”, let’s understand the realities and truths behind this saying through the targets mentioned in goal6-

- Target 6.1 “By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all”

In rural areas, arid and semi-arid regions and most developing countries, the source of drinking water is often located far from the main settlement areas. Therefore, women and girls who by majority are water gathers have to leave homes early in the morning to fetch water with no security in the way. Women often carry water in their head and usually for longer distances and that kind of load causes physical stress upon women. After coming home, they also have to engage themselves in other domestic chores causing more stress. Mothers often take daughters to fetch the water because ‘two hand is better than one’, this generates a negative impact on the education of their daughters. Similarly, in colder areas or during cold seasons, women are more prone to chronic diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis, bronchitis, frequent fevers and coughs due to early timing to fetch



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water. Women have to manage everything with the little water she brings; therefore, it causes mental stress and further deteriorates her situation.

- Similarly, target 6.2 aims “By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations”

Improper or inadequate and unhygienic sanitation facilities or infrastructure have more adverse impact on women and girls than men:

The absence of sanitation facilities encourages practice of open defecation, however women unlike men cannot defecate openly due to ‘modesty’. Therefore, during the dark i.e., night time, they go out which often results into rape, sexual assault or other forms of violence.

Absence of proper sanitation facilities at school affects adolescent girls at most as during her menstruation she has to stay at home which in turn affects her education.

Women and girls are more vulnerable to reproductive track diseases therefore proper and safe sanitation facilities are more important for them. During pregnancy and post-natal period proper sanitation is must in order to avoid any spread of any kind of diseases and illness. Also women and girls who use public sanitation facilities during the night are vulnerable towards sexual violence. Open defecation also leads to contamination of water in the area and since women and girls have to use it directly either for cooking or other domestic purposes, they are at higher health risk than the others.

Thus, development of proper channels of accessibility to water (clean and safe) and sanitation is equally important if women are to be protected and given equality. Gender analysis is relevant in the management of water as a natural resource, in the planning and design of sustainable water technologies and their application to local conditions (SIDA, 2016).

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG7 [Gender equality and Affordable and clean energy (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all)]

Women empowerment and energy availability and accessibility are intrinsically related.

Energy prosperity indeed leads to empowerment of women. Let’s understand this relationship through the targets embedded in SDG7

- Target 7.1- By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.

The mentioned target is in all certainty a catalyst for women empowerment.

Most women especially in rural areas still rely on traditional methods of cooking i.e., using wood and kerosene which produces a huge amount of smoke. The use of these is seldom sustainable and often has negative impacts on the local environment (SIDA, 2016). Equally, the inhaling of the smoke day after day results into various respiratory issues putting health at risk. The collection of the wood is mostly done by women either in nearby forest areas or forests located at larger distance. This always puts their lives at risk because chances of animal attack are always possible. Similarly, collection of wood in forest areas means possibility of sexual violence or any sexual act towards women. Electricity is another important aspect of women empowerment. With most women engaged in domestic chores, the absence of electricity and use of tradition amenities like candles, lamps etc, puts limitation and hardships to her work process. In areas where there is absence of electricity or uncertain electric supply, women and girls have to do most works manually which cause wastage of time. Thus, more time is spent on doing the household work which especially for teenage girls leaves little time for studies and hampers education. Energy access is a critical enabler to development, having a transformative role in enhancing productivity and effectiveness at home and at work (UNITED NATIONS ESCAP, 2017). The development of energy infrastructure will not only reduce the amount of time taken to do household chores, it will also lead to less reliability on wood and kerosene for energy which in turn helps in conservation of environment. The installation and development of sustainable energy sources such as solar panels will help in pollution control but also provides employment aspects to women as they can work in those developmental sources or earn through those sources for instance by selling bulbs, running small business-like tailoring, confectionary shops, taking tuitions etc. There are several cases of women in the delivery of energy services, mainly decentralized renewable energy technologies,



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including the dissemination of solar home systems and lanterns, improved cook stoves and the management of community-based off-grid systems (UNITED NATIONS ESCAP, 2017).

However, in the male dominated energy sector a challenge lies in raising awareness and promoting gender policies in institutions and organizations. (SIDA, 2016).

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG8 [Gender equality and Decent work and economic growth (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)]

Equal work participation is pre-requisite for inclusive sustainable economic growth. Equal work participation will enhance balance growth and development. In most of the low-income countries and developing countries, the rate of female work participation is still low or below average attributed to various socio-cultural and religious norms. Why low female work participation?

Large proportion of women still living in poverty and is dependent on the other gender for financial support. Often due to patriarchy, women are not free to work other than at home.

Mobility is restricted, therefore cannot move to places where they can pursue their job careers. Most women are engaged in informal economic activities without any economic appreciation and most maternity leaves are shorter and unpaid.

How gender equality for women empowerment will help in sustainable economic growth?

With more women joining the workforce, the per capita income of the family will increase, which in turn will aid in social and economic mobility of a family by improving standard of living. When both the genders of a family work, the children of the family can receive better education and vocation. With money comes power. When women start earning, they become financially independent and therefore can part take in decision making.

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG10 [Gender equality and Reduced inequalities (Reduce inequality within and among countries)]

Inequalities do exist between and within countries. Inequalities between the countries can only be bridged when inequalities and disparities within the country is resolved.

Economic opportunities irrespective of ethnicity, caste, religion and other status should be equally given. There should be no wage discrimination on the grounds of gender in order to eliminate income inequalities. Well managed and planned implementation of migration policies to safeguard mobility of women and girls for work. Sustainable and safe transport facilities to be provided for better accessibility and connectivity between work and home. Equal opportunities and participation in decision making and financial institutes. Creating a world with greater equality for generations to come is the defining and most urgent challenge of this century. Gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' human rights are fundamental for achieving human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development (THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION TURNS 20, 2015).

- ❖ SDG5 and SDG13 [Gender equality and Climate action (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts)]

Climate change is one of the most daunting crises of the present world. It affects everyone. Climate change is not just the changes in weather conditions and changes in environmental cycles but at much broader sense includes the consequences and impacts of all these climatic changes. The aftermath of any disasters and changes occurring out of climate change is always expensive, labour intensive and challenging. However, it is always more challenging for women and girls than their counter parts:

When disaster strikes and displacement happens, whether temporary or permanent, the episodes of violence (rape, sexual assault etc) are always high towards women and girls.

Climate induced disasters affects the availability of food while women have to face both availability and accessibility of food. Pregnant women and lactating women are worst hit amongst all. Similarly, women take longer time to recover from destructions as they have to be more engaged in cooking, cleaning, gathering resources and care-taking of others. When



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disaster takes place, job opportunities are limited and mostly skill-based labour is required, due to which women suffer unemployment. In rural areas women rely mostly on natural resources, therefore during climatic crisis, they are affected the most. Under representation of women in rehabilitation decision making process makes them an inactive actor in climate action.

Challenges And Drawbacks in Attaining Gender Responsive Sustainable Development

Transforming development into sustainable development is certainly not a myth but ongoing process and attempts. However, overcoming of the hurdles on the process is not always easy.

Following are the few and important challenges and drawbacks of making sustainable development gender responsive:

1. Difficult to change the attitudes

This is indeed amongst others, one of the greatest challenges that need to overcome. Not everyone is open to the idea of women becoming equal partners in development be it social, economic, political or environmental. To break the traditional, believe that women have to be sub- ordinate to men and men are “head of the family”, deep rooted in patriarchal system upon which families are founded is difficult though not impossible.

2. Attitude of women

Another equally important and challenging factor is changing the mindsets of a woman. The practice of becoming sub ordinate to a man and becoming the nominal head of the family has been practiced since one can remember. This long course of practice has made the idea of male as heads ‘normal’ and ‘not wrong’ even within women community be it educated or not educated. Thus, to change this long “tradition” amongst women is also often difficult and proves to be challenging at times.

3. Expensive transformation

If development is to be ‘sustainable’ and addition to it ‘gender responsive’, then the cost it will bear will be expensive as transformation of infrastructures into gender and environment sensitive right from the grass root level will be expensive especially for low income and developing countries.

4. Long process

Since transformation has to be brought from grass root level, the whole process requires a long-time scale.

5. Insufficient research and studies covering gender and development

Not everyone can relate development with gender and can understand how different gender perceives development and are affected differently. This can largely be attributed to the fact that not many studies and research have been undertaken in this regard and knowledge remains oblivious to most.

6. Gender mainstreaming is often difficult

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that was formally incorporated into the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. Gender mainstreaming is also not the same as gender balance or gender parity. It addresses the gender inequalities that are at the core of project, policy or process, and leads to more gender-responsive actions (MONTREAL PROTOCOL PROJECT, 2015).

To bring gender mainstreaming in economic, social and environmental institutes is often difficult, welcoming various backlashes and criticisms. It will be most difficult due to existing gaps between the two genders in all spheres and bridging of those gaps itself has numerous challenges.

Conclusion

The 2030 agenda to bring sustainable development in totality on the basis of the 17 goals is indeed established through the lens of gender equality and empowering women. Gender equality will benefit not only women population but everybody in general both men and women. Bringing women and girls in equilibrium to men in socio-economic, political and environmental aspects will open up unparallel opportunities for all and bring about sustained, harmonized and balanced development. The empowerment of women and girls will create rippling effects and enhance development and accelerate the process involved in attaining the sustainable development goals in recent years, progress on gender equality has been held back by forces in the global political and economic landscapes that have been particularly hard to mitigate or combat (THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION TURNS 20, 2015).

Countries have been increasingly removing laws that are discriminatory and adopted laws that are gender sensitive and address violence against women and girls. Significant normative advances have been made in the global agenda on women, peace and security.

However, there are still a large proportion of women and girls who are still living in conditions below average, are subjected to discrimination and violence, still unaware of the situation around them with little source and skill to levitate themselves from the



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situation. Until a united front is not available, achievement of gender equality will be a hard run which will slow down the overall development and let alone a sustainable one. Policies and interventions should take into account the distinct need for specific resources and services targeting women and girls (SIDA, 2016). Thus, a global partnership is required, where those having power and resources are to help those who don't, and everyone is to have an open mind if global sustainable development is to be attained and leave no one behind. 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 (STEVENS.C, 2010).

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