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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PRESENT CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY****Kabita Roy**

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This paper has tried to highlight on how aid focused on gender equality is typically concentrated in social sectors such as education and health, while only low levels of aid have been targeted to economic and governance sectors. Gender mainstreaming remains limited, and key institutions and mechanisms for promoting gender equality are often under-resourced and lack political support. The paper highlights the role females play towards achieving a sustainable development in an upcoming society in the global community. The productions of low-income yielding crops which are relegated to the females are highlighted. Issues bothering on gender-imbalance in the education of children in the society which has led to a concomitant decline in the number of females involved in science-oriented courses at the tertiary levels of education are discussed. The issues of poverty which forces female children into food vending as a means of enhancing the family economic base also lends a pointing finger at some of the reasons responsible for the decline. Lack of gainful employment of the men-folk, which has inadvertently forced females to take up the role of 'Breadwinners,' thereby short-circuiting the original role of female towards sustainable development are analyzed. Despite expanded normative commitments, equality is often undermined by a lack of implementation, institutional barriers and discriminatory social norms. In addition, increased access to education, for instance, has not been matched by policies to increase women's access to decent work, good employment conditions, promotion and equal pay. Progress is also hampered by the low levels of participation and leadership of women in decision-making, at all levels – household, local, regional and national governments, the management of environmental resources, national planning and development structures, national parliaments and global governance. In addition, monitoring progress is challenged by a severe lack of comparable data of high quality.

**Keywords:** Females, Poverty, Sustainable-Development, Labour, Economy.**Introduction**

Globally, about 565 million women are illiterate, mainly in poor rural areas. Fritschel and Mohan (2001) reports that the failure to educate these women when they were girl's may be due to factors ranging from the need for girl's labour in the home, attitudes that devalue education for girls, fears about girls' security outside the home, and lack of resources to pay for education. Educating the girl child has far reaching implications in the reduction in fertility since better educated females marry later and have fewer unwanted pregnancies; have higher earning power which may lower the number of children parents want as income earners and also, educated females reduce the infant mortality rate through better childcare. A World Bank study reports that girl's access to education creates a better environment for economic growth and that the result is particularly strong for middle-income countries. Thus, societies that has a preference for not investing in girl's education pay a price for it in terms of slower growth and reduced income. This according to Fritschel and Mohan (2001) explains the logic about keeping girls out of school becoming a vicious circle: girls do not get educated because there is a lack of wage-earning opportunities for women, and women who are uneducated cannot get wage-earning employment.

Women play very vital roles in the dynamics of a growing society albeit in a global community. The relegation of females to the background negates their usefulness as a part in the synergistic mechanism that yields sustainable development. Women play a significant role in agriculture, the world over. About 70 percent of the agricultural workers, 80 percent of food producers, and 10 percent of those who process basic foodstuffs are women and they also undertake 60 to 90 percent of the rural marketing; thus, making up more than two-third of the work force in agricultural production (FAO, 1985). In West Africa, up to 80 percent of the labour force in all trade is female. Yet, the role of women in these activities, so important economically, has remained obscure for long because women seldom played any major roles in political activities or decision-making processes (Spore, 1993). Despite the fact that women produce much of the food in the developing world, they also remain more malnourished than most men are. In many rural societies, women eat less food than men do, especially when the food is scarce, such as just before the harvest, or when the work load increases without a corresponding increase in the food intake (Roodkowsky, 1979).

Women's empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. This entails the idea of women's continued disadvantage compared to men which is apparent in different economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. Therefore, women's empowerment can also be seen as an important process in reaching gender equality, which is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female".

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According to the UN Population Fund, 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. Gender role expectations are institutionalized through legislative, educational, political and economic systems. Women need to be "empowered" in order to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field between women and men before gender equality can be reached and maintained.

### Global Review on Women's Empowerment Issues

In December 2014, the UN Secretary-General issued a report entitled "Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly" which bundles national and regional reviews and discusses progress, challenges and opportunities at the global level. The main findings of the report are the following:

Over the past two decades, governments have increasingly removed discriminating laws and have adopted laws promoting gender equality and addressing violence against women. Significant gains are also noted in the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary education. In several regions, women's participation in the labour market has increased, while some regions have made progress in increasing access to birth control. Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriages have started to decline in some contexts. Furthermore, some countries have made major gains in women's representation in national parliaments.

Nevertheless, global progress has been slow, uneven and limited. Despite expanded normative commitments, equality is often undermined by a lack of implementation, institutional barriers and discriminatory social norms. In addition, increased access to education, for instance, has not been matched by policies to increase women's access to decent work, good employment conditions, promotion and equal pay. Progress is also hampered by the low levels of participation and leadership of women in decision-making, at all levels – household, local, regional and national governments, the management of environmental resources, national planning and development structures, national parliaments and global governance. There continues to be a chronic underinvestment in gender equality globally, a tendency which has been aggravated by the austerity measures adopted in many countries in the post-crisis context. In addition, aid focused on gender equality is typically concentrated in social sectors such as education and health, while only low levels of aid have been targeted to economic and governance sectors. Women's organisations at all levels remain significantly under-resourced. Gender mainstreaming remains limited, and key institutions and mechanisms for promoting gender equality are often under-resourced and lack political support. In addition, monitoring progress is challenged by a severe lack of comparable data of high quality. Many countries are still not producing regular statistics that are of critical importance for gender equality such as time use, asset ownership, women's participation in decision-making at all levels, or data on gender-based violence and poverty.

### Sustainable Development and Issues of Gender Equality

Sustainable development has been defined by World Commission on Environment and Development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains two key concepts:

- the concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

There are three core elements that need to be harmonised in order to achieve sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. 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.

Sustainable Development includes the following targets with respect to Gender Equality:

1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere;
2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation;
3. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation;
4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;



6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;
- 6.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws;
- 6.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women;
- 6.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

## Conclusion

Gender equality and women's empowerment figure prominently in the 2030 Agenda. They are reflected in an integrated manner throughout the Agenda, and also considered critical for its achievement: in the Resolution on the Agenda, the General Assembly declares that "realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets". SDGs are linked to women's empowerment and there are targets on gender dimensions of poverty, health, education, employment and security, for example. In fact, gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential across all SDGs and their targets. Therefore, it is crucial to take a holistic view of gender equality throughout the entire framework.

Globally, females can play a central role in ensuring that the cycle of transmission of poverty from generation to generation is broken. Women have been known to be poorer than men globally. They are also deprived of adequate health, education and freedom in most societies. They as care-givers in the home, having the primary responsibility of caring for the children, have in them the potential of transmitting values to the next generation. Programmes put in place by National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) towards protecting vulnerable groups, specifically women and children, would go a long way towards alleviating the problems females face in a developing economy. These include increased representation of women to 30 percent in all programmes; education, including adult education; access to credit and land; maternal and child health. Education for the girl child; universal basic education; care of orphans and vulnerable children (children affected by HIV/AIDS); prevention and treatment of childhood diseases are also some of the targeted instruments. Women have a critical role to play in all SDGs, with many targets specifically recognizing women's equality and empowerment as both the objective and part of the solution. The choice of appropriate indicators to monitor the implementation of the SDGs it has an important impact on determining whether policy efforts towards women's empowerment are channelled adequately. Addressing the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, with all the seriousness that it requires, especially with a view towards empowering and investing in women, will bring about the much-needed sustainable development in a global society. As a result of a wide-ranging consultation process with the UN, Member States, civil society and international organizations, UN Women have put forward a position paper setting out suggestions for global indicators to effectively monitor how the SDGs are being implemented for women and girls. In their paper, UN Women call for including additional gender indicators for the relevant targets, as well as a systematic disaggregation by sex of all relevant indicators across all SDGs and targets.

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