



International Journal of *Home Science*

ISSN: 2395-7476

IJHS 2022; 8(2): 76-79

© 2022 IJHS

www.homesciencejournal.com

Received: 06-06-2022

Accepted: 09-07-2022

Dr. Aditi Mondal

Assistant Professor, Department
of Human Development,
Savitri Girls College, Kolkata,
University of Calcutta,
West Bengal, India

Gender equality and women's empowerment: The foundation stones of sustainability

Dr. Aditi Mondal

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/23957476.2022.v8.i3b.1353>

Abstract

Achieving gender equality will require enforceable legislation that promotes empowerment of all women and girls and requires secondary education for all girls. The targets call for an end to gender discrimination and for empowering women and girls through technology some have advocated for "listening to girls".

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly. On 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

Ecofeminism says that women are closer to nature than men are. This closeness, therefore, makes women more nurturing and caring towards their environment.

Women empowerment to promote sustainability is not simply an altruistic pursuit that requires philanthropic responses. It is a goal in itself for a variety of reasons and only one of numerous strategies that could be employed for the goal of sustainability to be achieved.

Keywords: Women empowerment, gender equality, sustainable development, social policy

Introduction

According to the World Bank in 1991, "Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy...and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them" (1998). Whereas women were previously neglected or ignored, there was increasing attention paid to the impact of women on the natural environment and, in return, the effects the environment has on the health and well-being of women. The gender-environment relations have valuable ramifications about the understanding of nature between men and women, the management and distribution of resources and responsibilities and the day-to-day life and well-being of people.

The definition of sustainable development is highly debated itself, but is defined by Harcourt as a way to "establish equity between generations" and to take into account "social, economic, and environmental needs to conserve non-renewable resources" and decrease the amount of waste produced by industrialization (Harcourt, Wendy). The first discourse that emerged in relation to women was Women in Development (WID), the perspective that advocated for women's status to be improved in developing countries which then transformed into Women, Environment, and Development (2016).

The next shift in discourse took place in the early 1970s, where people began to analyse the roots of development and start to look at alternative ways to go about interacting with the global community and developing countries, with women and the environment as central actors. This was defined as Women, Environment, Development. According to Schultz *et al.* (2016). "The women, environment and development debate is anchored in a critical view of development policies where the link between modernization/industrialization and technology on the one hand and environmental deterioration on the other is focused" (2016). WED discourse is centralized around the synthesis of different ideologies, one of which being ecofeminism. This ideology was transformed into the political sphere where it took a new shape as women having a socially constructed connection to nature through our global systems (1994).

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Aditi Mondal

Assistant Professor, Department
of Human Development,
Savitri Girls College, Kolkata,
University of Calcutta,
West Bengal, India

International Women's Day is celebrated on 8 March to achieve one of the Sustainable Development Goals in United Nation's 2030 Agenda, the gender equality between men and women.

Women constitute half the world's population. True, their role in achieving sustainability objectives cannot be over-emphasized. However, empowering women is necessary to empower the earth. Gender equality and sustainability have four possible pathways. Many women are stuck in poverty, poor health, high mortality, environmental degradation and lack of opportunities. If the earth is to be sustainably developed, women's empowerment is very much necessary. The four pathways of female empowerment and sustainability include (2003):

- a) Choice,
- b) Stewardship,
- c) Economic development and
- d) Human and capital resources.

Other elements of empowerment may be access to income, credit, education and decision making authority. With higher education, women are likely to feel that they have more options and may choose to work rather than stay home with their children. They may then be able to take decisions about the trade-offs of child bearing on their personal, familial and social lives. The sustainability perspective is one more reason for corporate leaders to increase opportunities for women through internal programmes of developing female leaders and policy makers, and of improving gender equity in society. The accomplishment of the goal of gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly (2003). On 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". There are 169 targets for the 17 goals. Each target has between one and three indicators used to measure progress toward reaching the targets. In total, 232 approved indicators will measure compliance (2001).

Goal 1: No poverty

"End poverty in all its forms everywhere."

Goal 2: Zero hunger

"End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture".

Goal 3: Good health and well-being for people

"Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

Goal 4: Quality education

"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

Goal 5: Gender equality

"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." According to the UN (2005), "gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world." Providing

women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will nurture sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. A record 143 countries guaranteed equality between men and women in their constitutions as of 2014. However, another 52 had not taken this step. In many nations, gender discrimination is still woven into the fabric of legal systems and social norms. Even though SDG5 is a stand-alone goal, other SDGs can only be achieved if the needs of women receive the same attention as the needs of men. Issues unique to women and girls include traditional practices against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, such as female genital mutilation (2001). Child marriage has declined over the past decades, yet there is no region that is currently on track to eliminate the practice and reach SDG targets by 2030. If current trends continue, between 2017 and 2030, 150 million girls will be married before they turn 18. Though child marriages are four times higher among the poorest than the wealthiest in the world, most countries need to accelerate progress between both groups in order to reach the SDG Goal 5 target to eliminate child marriage by 2030.

Achieving gender equality will require enforceable legislation that promotes empowerment of all women and girls and requires secondary education for all girls. The targets call for an end to gender discrimination and for empowering women and girls through technology some have advocated for "listening to girls". The assertion is that the SDGs can deliver transformative change for girls only if girls are consulted. Their priorities and needs must be taken into account. Girls should be viewed not as beneficiaries of change, but as agents of change. Engaging women and girls in the implementation of the SDGs is crucial.

Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation

Sustainable management of water and sanitation for all."

Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy

"Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all."

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

"Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

"Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation".

Goal 10: Reducing inequalities

"Reduce income inequality within and among countries."

Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities

"Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable."

Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

"Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns."

Goal 13: Climate action

"Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy."

Goal 14: Life below water

"Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development."

Goal 15: Life on land

"Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss."

Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals

"Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development."

The sustainable development goals, otherwise known as the global goals, are a universal call for action against poverty, for the protection of the planet and for ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 goals of sustainable development build on the success of the millennium development goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice and gender equality.

Women's equality with men and women's empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It is integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. In a broad sense, empowerment of a woman means two things – liberty from her subordination in the family and release from her Subalternity in society.

Women and Environment

Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva wrote that there is a connection between dominance of women and dominance of nature. Shiva said (2001), "The rupture within nature and between man and nature, and its associated transformation from a life-force that sustains to an exploitable resource characterizes the Cartesian view which has displaced more ecological world-views and created a development paradigm which cripples nature and woman simultaneously". Exploitation of women's labour as well as the abuse of natural environment are connected as they are both marginalized within the economy. This argument supports ecofeminism in that women in developing countries rely on nature to survive, therefore, destruction of the environment results in elimination of women's method to survival. According to Jiggins, environmental degradation effects women the most, furthering the inequalities between men and women. One study (1992) showed that new developments in technology and developments in land access are denied to women, furthering their subordination and inequality.

Theories of Women and Environmental Movement Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism says that women are closer to nature than men are. This closeness, therefore, makes women more nurturing and caring towards their environment. Ecofeminism encompasses a variety of views but has a focus of patriarchal oppression and the social constructions relating to women and the environment. Some indicate the biology of women as the reason behind the closeness, while others credit culture and historical factors. An ecofeminist believes in a direct connection between oppression of nature and the

subordination of women. Vandana Shiva is credited with bringing ecofeminism into public consciousness by her reports of the Chipko movement.

Environmental or ecological feminism

Environmental or ecological feminism differs from ecofeminism in that it is more focused on the actual, specific interactions with the environment. Connections between environment and gender can be made by looking at the gender division of labour and environmental roles rather than an inherent connection with nature. The gender division of labour requires a more nurturing and caring role for women, therefore that caring nature places women closer with the environment. The knowledge of nature is shaped by the experiences an individual has. Women have a distinct knowledge of the land, yet are excluded from policy decisions of development on that land. This is prominent in many developing countries where the responsibility of collecting fuel and fodder is placed upon the women. Both the resources and the meanings are taken into consideration with environmental feminism (1998).

Feminist political ecology

Feminist political ecology builds from ecofeminism and environmental feminism and lays out three essential factors that are:

1. Gendered knowledge is the ways in which access to scientific and ecological knowledge is structured by gender.
2. Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, including differential access by men and women to various legal and de facto claims to land and resources.
3. Gendered politics and grassroots activism, including an examination of women within and as leaders of environmental movements.

Feminist political ecology seeks to discover the role and place of women in environmental development on a political scale. Mei Ng from China, Vandana Shiva from India, Wangari Muta Maathai from Kenya, Maria Cherkasova from Russia, Rachel Carson from America Jane Goodall from Africa are well known Women environmentalists in the world.

Ecological movements initiated by women are also remarkable as Chipko movement in India, Green Belt movement in Kenya, Navodaya movement in India.

Role of the society

Many women are suffering in a vicious web of poverty, high fertility, poor health, environmental degradation and lack of opportunities. Women must be empowered as ambassadors of natural resources and the environment and as contributors to socio economic progress if the earth is to be sustainably developed. There is a strong correlation between women's educational achievement and total fertility rates. Stewardship: Evidence suggests that, because of their primary responsibility of providing for their families, women are more careful stewards of natural resources and the environment. In future, empowered women, may have a greater influence on stewardship practices within their families, their communities and in wider spheres.

Following is some footprint of women empowerment (1994):

1. Economic Development: Although the relationship between economic development and ecological impact is highly complex, it is clear that as nations grow wealthier, their environmental impacts also grow. Women

empowerment might speed economic activity and thereby enlarge ecological footprint, whereas better-informed economic choices made by women also mitigate the impact of that growth on the environment at discrete stages of development.

2. Human and capital resources: Higher incomes alone might reduce unsustainable land use by the rural poor. In terms of human and capital resources, women empowerment may also improve land stewardship and other sustainable practices.

Conclusion

Women empowerment to promote sustainability is not simply an altruistic pursuit that requires philanthropic responses. It is a goal in itself for a variety of reasons and only one of numerous strategies that could be employed for the goal of sustainability to be achieved. Moreover, sustainability itself, it warrants repeating, is not a quixotic dream. If rapid progress is not made towards its realisation, business and other stakeholders will increasingly feel that the impact directly and painfully. Without adequate energy and other natural resources, heightening competition could not only lead to ever more onerous monetary costs but also to geopolitical and civil strife.

It can be concluded with the quotation of Nobel Lauriat Amartya Sen (2011) “Advancing gender equality may be one of the best ways of saving the environment, and countering the dangers of overcrowding and other adversities associated with population pressure. The voice of women is critically important for the world’s future – not just for women’s future.”

References

1. Agarwal B. The Gender and environment debate: lessons from India Feminist studies. 1992;18(1):119-158.
2. Agarwal B. Disinherited peasants, disadvantaged workers: a gender perspective on land and livelihood Economic and Political Weekly. 1998;33(13-3).
3. Aguilar Lorena. Gender Perspective on Climate Change Commission on Status of Women, 52nd Session; c2008.
4. Benerai Lourdes. Gender Development and Globalization: Economics as if all people mattered, New York, Routledge; c2016.
5. Braidotto Rosi. Women: The Environmental and Sustainable Development, Zed Books in association with INSTRAW; c1994.
6. Duflo Esther. Gender Equality in Development; c2005.
7. Harcourt Wendy. Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development, International Society for Development.
8. Laudazi Marina. Gender and Sustainable Development in Drylands. Fao; c2003.
9. Merchant Earthcare C. Women and the Environment, New York. Routledge; c1996.
10. Pachuca Shonali, Jiang Leiwon. The Household Energy Transition in India and China; c2008.
11. Tiondi T. Women, Environment and Development, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America; c2001.
12. United Nations Environmental Programme, Global 500 Environmental Forum; c2011.
13. Ward Hugh. Liberal Democracy and Sustainability, Environmental Politics. June 2008;17(3).
14. Wenz Peter S. Environmental Ethics Today, New York, Oxford University Press; c2001.
15. World Bank. Using Microcredit to Advance Women. PREM note; c1998.