

## GENDER EQUALITY: KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Gender equality is not only a human right: it can also be a driver of sustainable development. Policies and programming to empower women can strengthen and better integrate the economic, environmental, and social strands of sustainable development. Not only do women benefit from gender equality—so do men and children and future generations.

For example, [gender inequality has been shown to be detrimental to economic growth](#). Recent [World Bank research](#) finds that eliminating traditional barriers that prevent women from working in certain occupations would reduce the productivity gap between male and female workers by one-third to one-half, and increase output per worker by 3-25% in many countries. Men and children, as well as women, would benefit from these increases in output and incomes.

Empowerment is often key to unblocking women's participation in political and social life more broadly, which can improve the implementation of development policies and programming, as well as design. As noted by the [2011 Human Development Report](#), when barriers to political, legal, and social participation are reduced, women—and other excluded groups—can make vital contributions as agents of change.

### ***Women entrepreneurs can make transitions to low-emission economies, climate-resilient communities happen***

According to the [International Finance Corporation](#), women-owned firms constitute about a third of small and medium-sized businesses in developing countries. However, women's potential contributions to socially and ecologically sustainable businesses—via the design and dissemination of resource-conserving technologies, trade and investment, land restoration, infrastructure development, and urban recycling and waste management—remain largely untapped. This is partly due to discrimination that limits access to finance, land and other assets, information, and training, as well as access to decent jobs with equal pay.

### ***UNDP and gender equality***

UNDP focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment not only as human rights, but also because they are a pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

[Our work on gender equality and women's empowerment](#) focuses on the intersection of:

- Gender equality, poverty reduction, and equitable growth;
- Gender and democratic governance;
- Gender, energy and environment;
- Gender, human rights, and HIV/AIDS; and
- Gender and crisis prevention and recovery.

With support from governments, development agencies and private investors, women can benefit from and contribute to opportunities created by movement toward more inclusive, resilient communities. For example, through a [partnership between the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme and the Barefoot College of India](#), rural women are being trained to maintain off-grid solar panels in African countries. This initiative is providing clean energy to communities, while empowering women and creating new jobs.

Women's unpaid work, including the collection of water and household fuels, small-scale food production, and other contributions to resource-related livelihoods, need to be explicitly valued in sustainability indicators. The gender-defined roles of women and men as consumers and producers should be taken into account in the design and implementation of programming and policies. As demonstrated by the UNDP-supported [Gender-responsive Economic Policy and Management Initiative](#) and the [Women's Green Business Initiative](#), this requires strengthening capacities to integrate gender perspectives into economic policy, particularly in the design of subsidies, taxes, and pricing.

## ***Empowering communities through gender-responsive programming for climate change mitigation and adaptation***

The poor, and particularly poor women, bear the brunt of the [burden of natural disasters](#). Women are also often more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. At the same time, by drawing on women's community-level experience as resource managers, caretakers, and networkers, climate responses can be made more effective and sustainable. Capturing these lessons typically means integrating gender perspectives into the design, financing, and implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation programming, especially as it affects food security and agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water resources, eco-tourism, energy, disaster risk reduction, and recovery. For example, in Haiti following devastating tropical storms in 2008, UNDP worked to ensure that women had access to the finance needed to replant fields and engage productively in broader economic recovery plans.

Expanding access to reliable energy services can also have large multiplier effects on poverty reduction, job creation, improved health and education outcomes, and women's empowerment. Household energy efficiency investments—in improved stoves and cleaner fuels, in waste-for-biogas equipment—can improve sanitation and health conditions for billions of people. As women in many countries bear primary responsibilities for organizing the household, gender-sensitive approaches are needed to make such programming work.

Carbon funding is increasingly being mobilized to finance programming to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, and to promote sustainable consumption and production. If administered wisely—including via gender-responsive budgeting and public-private partnerships—these funds can help transform traditional gender roles and reduce inequalities between women and men.

By contrast, the failure to recognize women and men's diverse needs and perspectives in the design and implementation of such investments could further disadvantage women, as well as other vulnerable groups. 'Green finance' should therefore include social and environmental safeguards to protect the interests of the poor, so as to fully realize their potential and to help achieve the intertwined social, economic, and environmental goals of sustainable development.

## ***Meaningful participation of women and men through legal and political empowerment***

Institutionalized processes to ensure meaningful participation of women and men, including partners from civil society, the private sector, and community networks, are key to successful development programming. [Recent research](#) confirms that women's participation in decision making is positively correlated with stronger environmental awareness and better environmental management, with important multiplier effects for the well-being of families and communities, as well as for

## ***Gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals—post-2015***

- The global development framework of the future is certain to be a key discussion issue at Rio +20. Sustainable Development Goals—or at least the principles to underpin them—and their links to the [Millennium Declaration](#) and the [Millennium Development Goals](#) that are at the heart of the current framework and which run until 2015, are particularly important in this context. The need to address persistent social, economic, and political gender gaps should figure prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals. Because progress in achieving gender equality also means progress for many other development objectives, gender equality targets and indicators should be integrated in all the other goals—over and above whatever specific gender Sustainable Development Goals will be agreed upon by member states.
- A range of quantitative and qualitative techniques are needed to ensure that assessments of progress towards sustainable development include a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. Data that are disaggregated by sex are key to these efforts, but represent only one core component. Existing MDG indicators and targets, and UNDP's [human development indices](#), as well as data from market and household surveys, and from environmental and social safeguard systems, need to be expanded and adapted to national contexts.

the development of local markets. Making this happen requires removing obstacles to women's social, economic and political participation, including formal and informal legal barriers.

## ***Sustainable social development through expanded social protection and social services***

In many developing countries, [expanded social protection and social services](#) can play important roles in ensuring that women and other vulnerable groups are protected from the impact of climate change and related shocks. They can also accelerate transitions to more sustainable consumption and production patterns, while helping to reduce poverty and empower women. This means ensuring that the design of social service programming is informed by gender analysis, and that its implementation benefits from the participation of women as well as men.

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