

Role of Women & Education-Impact on Sustainable Development

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Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full Participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development"

(Principle 20, Rio Declaration)

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It therefore encapsulates 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. This paper focuses on women's education & empowerment as a key process in reaching gender equality and, through that, sustainable development. It first discusses the concepts of women's education, empowerment and sustainable development and shows how both are inter-linked through the lens of intra and inter-generational justice. The aim of the paper highlights what needs to be done, and is being done, for women's empowerment, both through building an enabling policy environment and through enhancing women's capacity as active agents of change for sustainable development..

Sustainable development refers to a mode of human development in which resource use aims to meet human needs while ensuring the sustainability of natural systems and the environment, so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come.

The concept of sustainable development has in the past most often been broken out into three constituent parts: Environment sustainability, social sustainability & Economic

sustainability. More recently, it has been distinguished into four domains of economic, ecological, political and cultural sustainability.

Education changed women's role in society dramatically. Occupations were limited but women began to seep into the male-dominated world. After experiencing higher learning, aspirations changed and gradually society's expectations had to change as well. Education bred confidence and empowerment. With empowerment came the realization that women should not be considered lesser citizens than men and therefore should have the same rights enjoyed by men. Educated women were more apt to challenge men's role as the dominant figure and the flawed rationale for the denial of suffrage... A narrowness of education resulted in narrowness of experience, outlook, and life. Once they began to get educated they began to challenge society's expectations as well as broaden their personal experiences.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To critically examine the role of women in the modern society
2. To study the role of women and Education
3. To know how Role of women & Education contribute to sustainable development

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.

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 control over their own lives. As such, it 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.

Sustainable development refers to a development process which enhances peoples' capacity to create and consume wealth on a lasting basis. Sustainable development requires, among other things, a socio-economic, political and cultural environment which enables people to engage in and sustain the development process. The political system should provide stability to allow people to engage in production. Intra-ethnic conflicts, tribal wars and social tensions, as well as denial of basic human rights, constrain efforts to promote sustainable development. The social relationships between individuals and communities can either promote or constrain sustainable development. Social security is thus one of the necessary prerequisites for promoting sustainable development.

Besides social security, there is a need for economic freedom. Economic freedom in this context refers to a condition which enables women to utilize their innovative and creative capacities in the development process; protects individual economic rights to have access to productive assets, including land rights; provides a right to control one's labour in terms of decisions to engage in economic activity of one's choice; and conveys a right to control the fruits of one's labour. It also implies a right to gainful employment.

In ideal conditions, therefore, women, like men, need political stability which guarantees protection of their basic human rights, social security to be able to engage in productive activities, the right to develop and utilize their talents, fair pay for the work they perform, and the right to participate in the management of their societies as intellectuals, policy makers, producers and consumers.

This is the context within which the roles of women in promoting sustainable development will be discussed.

Constraints

The conditions under which women have been participating in the development process have not enabled them to enhance

their capacity to utilize their physical and intellectual energies in promoting sustainable development. Three areas are considered to have limited women's contribution to sustainable development: policy environment, social cultural setting and women's initiatives.

The Policy Environment

Most development plans and policies of the countries have been "gender blind." The planning and policy making processes in the region have failed to appreciate the fact that women and men have different roles and that their needs and constraints are different.

Policy makers and planners have failed to address the socially structured subordination of women to men. Unequal division of labour, legal discrimination against women and abuse of women's basic human rights have been more or less ignored by policy makers and planners, despite the lip service paid to the elimination of sexual discrimination.

In brief, plans and policies have not been "gender responsive." That is, they have not recognized existing gender imbalances, and have not taken into account the different gender roles which men and women play. Women are therefore constrained in participating effectively in the development process because their subordinate position in society is ignored in development planning and policy making, while their concrete needs are equally ignored. This is reflected in the manner in which resources are allocated and utilized.

Access to Land and Unequal Division of Labour

Land tenure systems, for instance, are based on discriminatory policies. While most states have considered agriculture the backbone of their economies and acknowledge the significant role of women in the agricultural sector, few have paid much attention to the land tenure systems which have been discriminating against women.

Women's access to loans and other credit facilities for agricultural improvement has been constrained by their inability to own land. The impact of discriminatory land tenure systems on agricultural production and specifically on production of food crops; is an area which needs careful analysis by policy makers and planners. This problem is more pronounced in countries where the migrant labour system has led to an increase in female heads of household who lack power and control over the land they work. This condition is worsened by the fact that the existing rural credit policies are also blind to the existing discriminatory systems. Women

agricultural producers are not benefiting from rural credit facilities and this limits their contribution to promoting sustainable development in this sector.

Agriculture continues to be the backbone of Indian economies.. Land clearing is normally assigned to men, and men participate in tilling the land. Weeding is normally done by women, who are also responsible for transporting crops from the farm to the home or to cooperative units. In terms of division of labour, studies have indicated that women have been contributing more time in the agricultural cycle than men. A recent study done for the World Bank, for instance, estimated that women in India produce up to 80% of all staple foods but own less than 10% of the land. In another study, on the world economic crisis and its impact on women, it was further estimated that women in this region contribute up to 30% of labour in ploughing, 50% of labour in planting, 60% of labour in weeding, 85% of labour in processing and preserving food, while performing up to 95% of all domestic chores. Indeed, throughout rural India, women's labour input is estimated to be three times that of men.. Women who live in the villages work harder than everybody else in India But men who live in the villages are on leave for half of their lives."

Educational Policies and Gender Discrimination

Educational policies and educational plans have also limited the ability of women to fully utilize their intellectual energies in the management of their economies.

In addition to marginal participation of women in education, and particularly in institutions of higher learning, women are stereotyped into those disciplines which groom them for traditional roles such as nursing, community service and secretarial work. In India for instance, in 2000 university enrolment figures indicated that females were concentrated in the fields of Nursing, Bachelor of Education and Humanities, while males dominated the fields of Law and Bachelor of Science & Management. This implies that in the formal sector, women will be employed in the health sector and other related services while men will continue to dominate the judiciary, law-making organs and the scientific fields. This implies that women will continue to play a very marginal role in decisions regarding the laws of the land and science and technology.

Women's Participation in Policy Making

Women constitute a very small minority in policy making bodies, such as parliament, cabinet, judiciary and managerial and executive positions in both public and private sectors... Despite the introduction of a quota system, which has ensured

the maintenance of a certain percentage of women in Parliament. Women members of parliament have scarcely exceeded the desired percentage. This trend explains the reason that the country have not made any fundamental changes in the laws they inherited from the pre-colonial patriarchal structures and those introduced by the colonial patriarchal rule, which favored men. Such laws include those related to issues of property rights, marriage and child custody.

Population Policies

Population policies and strategies have been abusing women's rights. The women should be able to determine the number of children they need, when they need them, and their spacing. This means having a right to decide on the type of contraceptives they use.

Human resources development and utilization must also take into consideration the reproductive processes, both biological and social, of human resources. Investment in development of human resources has to include, among other things, maternal and child care services, education, water, housing and health.

The 'domestic' environment, for many women, in villages is very stressful. Women invest a lot of their productive energies in processing and cooking food. The time wasted in looking for firewood and water, as well as time spent in processing food to make it ready for cooking, could be saved if water and firewood were within reach and if cooking stoves were improved. The grinding stone, which is still in use in many parts of India for processing maize and millet, the main traditional staple foods, consumes a lot of women's labor time. Where the grinding mill has been introduced, it is not making a significant impact because some women have to spend long hours walking to the mill and even longer hours waiting for their turn.

The care of children remains essentially a woman's role. In the Indian traditional setting, the care of young infants and siblings was a collective responsibility. This has been altered due to various socio-economic changes which are taking place on the continent. Lack of community support in caring and rearing of children has made it extremely difficult for women to contribute effectively to promoting sustainable growth. Women have to perform most of their tasks with babies

This not only affects their labor output, but also, in a negative way, their health and that of their babies. In order to enhance the quality of human resources, there is a need to invest in and improve the necessary tools of labor, as well as to provide support services. There is a need for a clearly spelled out

policy which addresses the whole question of human resources. The plans must clearly define the strategies which will facilitate the improvement of the process. This also means recognizing and giving value to tasks such as child bearing, rearing and caring, caring for the sick and the old, and all the domestic chores needed for the maintenance and reproduction of human capital.

Both men and women cannot engage in productive activities when the state fails to provide minimum security. For women, however, social insecurity has not been confined to war-torn countries. Existing legal systems have failed to protect women against abuses of their basic human rights. The majority of women are living in an actual and potentially explosive and violent environment. The issue of domestic violence has not been addressed by existing political systems, yet the mass media is full of horrifying reports of domestic violence, especially against women and children. Employers and senior executives have sexually harassed women. Some learning institutions, including universities, have created very hostile environments for female students a factor which might constrain their academic performance, as well as discourage their participation in these institutions as students and academic staff. Women's contribution to the production of knowledge is thus diminished.

There seems to be a need for policies which clearly spell out what constitutes violence against women. Measures to protect women against various forms of violence, including domestic violence and violence at the workplace, have to be clearly strategized.

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Socio-Cultural Norms

Besides the policy environment, women have also been constrained by existing socio-cultural norms through which they are perceived as inferior or second class citizens.

Although the position of women in traditional societies remains undocumented, there has been a tendency to use culture and tradition to undermine that position. This has had a negative impact in promoting sustainable development. Culture has been used to justify the subordinate position of women in the household, a factor which excludes women from property ownership. Culture has also been used to justify the existing unequal division of labor. Some cultural norms concerning age of marriage and marriage rights have also limited women's participation in formal schooling. For culture to play that dynamic role, women themselves have to create an alternative culture that challenges the one endorsed. This is the context in which women's initiatives have to be analyzed.

Women's Initiatives

Participation of women in the development process has been constrained by their inability to influence policy making and planning, as well as by their inability to change the patriarchal ideology which continues to legitimize their subordinate status in society. Women have taken various initiatives in order to overcome some of the constraints which limit their effective participation in the development process. A few have organized economic groups and cooperative ventures.

This means they have to play a more aggressive role in the management of their societies. The nation has to recognize that unless men and women participate in designing development programmes and formulating policies for the development process, sustainable development will remain a distant dream.

Role of Education in women for Sustainable Development

The Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability and specifically Education for Sustainable Development in the post-2015 Development Agenda ran from April 29th – May 17th 2013, and was co-led by Stephanie Hodge with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Yoko Mochizuki with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). There were 158 contributions to the discussion, from individuals, NGOs, consultants, policy centers, researchers and educators. Discussants participated from diverse geographical locations, with contributions from: Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, Estonia, France, India, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, New Zealand, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Spain,

Switzerland, Togo, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the 1 States of America.

There was overall general consensus that education, be it formal, non-formal or informal, is the key to sustainable development. However, the greatest challenge to sustainable development, environmental sustainability and education for sustainable development (ESD) is the current socioeconomic system in place. Ultimately, the discourse on education and sustainable development needs to induce a paradigm shift, in terms of political ideologies, global economic structures and our global cultural dynamics. The post-2015 development agenda needs to first and foremost address the socioeconomic system, as ESD is only a means to developing a more effective education model, and not the solutic sustainability challenges.

Having said this, ESD is still a critical lever for sustainable development. Sustainable development cannot be achieved by political agreements, financial incentives and technological solutions alone. The society need to change how to think and act, and that is where ESD has a critical role to play. No doubt education is shaped by society, but education also shapes society in profound ways. ESD can contribute to making education systems not only responsive to, and prepared for, current and emerging challenges, but also a truly proactive force in triggering market and political pressures to move the sustainable development agenda forward, empowering us all to make informed decisions as citizens, workers and consumers.

Key Points:

- **Schooling is currently inequitable and ineffective.** Schooling in many parts of the world has failed to be inclusive and relevant, often reproducing socio-economic inequalities (based on gender, class, ethnicity and other ascribed attributes), driving people to pursue material prosperity rather than *human and ecological well-being*. Additionally, considering the cross-cutting nature of education, this reinforcement of inequalities will hinder not only the education goals but also the overall development goals.
- **ESD has focus on issues of equity in and through education** Therefore post-2015 education goals and initiatives need to focus on rights-based, quality, gender equality inclusive and transformative education — the main tenets of ESD. Moreover, ESD needs to be integrated in other development sectors, as this will strengthen capabilities and capacities and overall resilience, especially within vulnerable populations.

- **Redefine “quality” education** is inclusive of both Western and local knowledge, and draws on learners cognitive (thinking and reasoning), affective (emotional) and practical (action) potentials and capacities in and out of classroom, and imparts *values* of ecological integrity and equitable prosperity.
- **Children’s participation** is a vital component to ESD and sustainable development. Through their inclusion in the democratic and participatory process to planning, children will first better understand what a democratic process entails, and through their involvement in the decision making process will be empowered to take action in their communities — the ultimate goal of ESD.
- **Current education system reinforces a hegemonic production and control of knowledge**, which are based on the interests of dominant groups — both nationally and internationally. Therefore there is a need for the reorientation of education, which is the foundation of ESD. This reorientation steers away from the current western dominant unstable education model, and equips all learners with knowledge (scientific and traditional), skills and values needed for shaping a sustainable world. Moreover, ESD calls for the reorientation of current practices in all sectors of the society, not only within education and academia.
- **Education planning needs to be participatory and cross-sect oral** where all groups’ learning needs are respected and incorporated within the curricula and pedagogy that is principle and value based. It is also imperative that leaders at all levels and n all sectors are engaged in the environmental sustainability discussions and planning.

Envisioning the post-2015 agenda: contributors

Contributors are hopeful that the post 2015 discussions will influence global institutions, makers with the United Nations and other global development organizations. However, a large concern was that the e-discussions, much like education planning, did not capture the knowledge and voices of those on the grassroots, and therefore there is danger that the current status quo will remain when only leaders and Ministries are lobbied to participate in the planning process.

- **Education for behavior change:** two-fold within ESD; on the one hand it can be used as a tool to change behavior, on the other hand education must also be operationalized to shape new behavior. The behavior to be shaped is one that reflects a value and conservation of the environment, as well as resilience to climate change and environmental risks. ESD as quality, inclusive and transformative education will contribute to creating equitable, sustainable and resilient societies. Contributors noted the importance of training teachers on how to be role models, as well as encouraging them to employ experiential and participatory learning. As a contributor from the Center for Environment Education (CEE) in India observes, successful behavior change programming is a consequence of a flexible learning process highlight with practical activities and coupled with mentoring from teachers, parents and other adults.
 - **Education for poverty reduction & women Empowerment:** In order for the poor and vulnerable to escape intergenerational poverty, education needs to increase access to all and encourage resiliency and local innovation to ensure productivity and upward social and economic mobility. However, in order for this to occur, there needs to be a change in the current economic policies. The notions and values underpinning capitalist, socialist and communist economic systems, and which system would bring about greater equality. Education fosters Women Empowerment and this contributes to sustainable development.
- Instilling the values and ethics for sustainable societies:** is the cornerstone of ESD and sustainable development. The education system should not only focus on intellectual and technological growth, but should be rooted principles, ethics, and values of a society which embodies the importance of the environment, promotes collaboration and is free of elitism, classism, sexism and other forms of exclusion and oppression. To have an education system that is based on a moral philosophy and promotes moral education will ultimately lead to sustainable development. Broad values—with ethical, ideological, socio-cultural and aesthetic dimensions—that lead to sustainable societies will need to be agreed upon, and should be the foundation of the education framework. However, how these values are determined and transferred through education needs to be part of the continued discourse on ESD and environmental sustainability.
- **ESD is lifelong learning and cross sectoral** and in order to truly affect behavior change towards sustainable development, ESD needs to be mainstreamed in the education system from early childhood education through to tertiary education, within adult education, and in non-formal education programming. Moreover, as environmental sustainability challenges are complex and interconnected, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to tackle them. It is therefore crucial to including ESD within other sectors such as economics, business, politics, health & women related issues, etc. Additionally, recognizing that parents and communities are a large influence on children, ESD programming and principles should be transmitted to these stakeholders.
 - **Curricula and pedagogy:** are the most vital component of ESD. That the curricula should not only be limited to environmental education and environmental awareness, such as through mainstreaming climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into the education sector, but students should also learn about the political and economic context of environmental issues. Deepening students’ understanding of ecological, economic and sociocultural systems that impact their lives, livelihoods and living directly will motivate them to take informed decisions and responsible actions, for example taking initiatives for reducing inequalities within their communities, nations or globally or for sustainable consumption and lifestyles. Curricula and pedagogy should be context specific in order for it to be effective and relevant. It should also be based on child-centered learning and promote an ability to think critically and creatively. Practices that may promote these skills are peer-to-peer learning, and self-directed learning.
 - **“Education, training and capacity building:** ESD encompasses education, public awareness and training for all sectors. Education and training systems need to focus on building human capacities to cope with existing and emerging sustainability challenges. Training institutions such as agricultural colleges, engineering schools, and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions should be used as vehicles for building “green skills” such as ecosystem management and other human capacities for a green economy. Moreover, through capacity building, barriers to north-south technology transfer will be diminished. Creating a platform for more

communication and exchange of knowledge internationally would be beneficial to the ESD and education agenda. Within the theme of capacity building, discussants also spoke about using universal education to contribute to strengthened capacity and capabilities of societies. With the mainstreaming of ESD and environmental sustainability in all sectors, more sustainable practices would be applied to all professions and sectors.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prioritize ESD and education:** in environmental sustainability and sustainable development goals.
- **Involve private sector** in discussion and education planning for environmental sustainability & women empowerment. It is imperative that businesses integrate developmental plans into their business models in order to ensure sustainability. Moreover, as financing education is costly, this sector can be involved in financing. A more knowledgeable business sector, practicing environmentally sound practices will also lead to the development of sustainable societies. Within this sector, the media and advertising houses can also be leveraged to increase awareness and sensitization on environmental issues. Moreover, as media has a significant effect on consumerism, a reorientation of media is also needed in order to achieve sustainability. Additionally, ESD and environmental sustainability goals should target business schools and management related academic institutions in order to transform business and economy.

"Education either functions as an instrument...to bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women...discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." Paulo Freire"

CONCLUSION

Women have taken various initiatives in order to overcome some of the constraints which limit their effective participation in the development process. Women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. The leadership role of women resolve to promote gender equality and women empowerment. Women Empowerment ensures their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels. Women can contribute to the sustainable Development

process if they are part of those who design plans and formulate policies. This means that they have to play a very responsible role in the society. Education is shaped by society, but education also shapes society in profound ways. ESD can contribute to making education systems not only responsive to, and prepared for, current and emerging challenges, but also a truly proactive force in triggering market and political pressures to move the sustainable development agenda forward by empowering women to make informed decisions as citizens, workers and consumers.

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