

How Does Gender Inequality Impede Sustainable Development?

Rachel Keating

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“Gender equality both strengthens sustainable development and is a precondition for it” Gerd Johnsson-Latham.

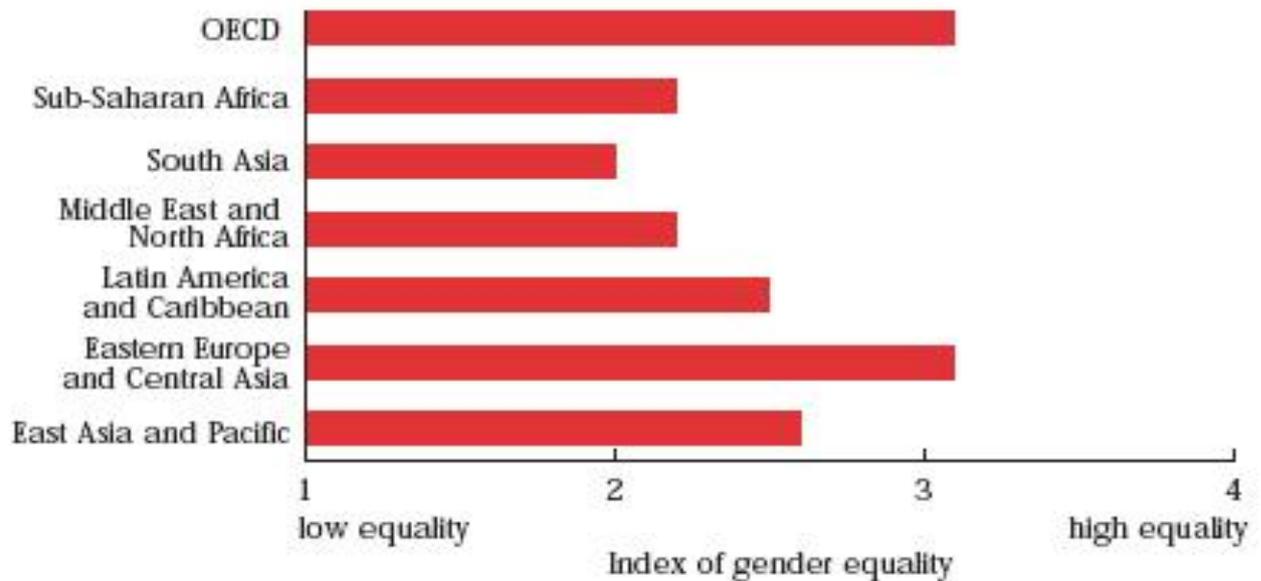
Introduction

I decided to do my essay on how gender inequality impedes sustainable development after I had a couple of failed attempts at other essays. It sounded fairly interesting and after doing a quick Google search I could see that there would be enough information to be able to get to the required 3000 words without having to waffle away the dozen or so pages. I'm looking forward to this essay because I think I'm going to learn a lot. It could be an interesting experience because it's the first essay we've had to write since starting college. Now to launch into the next 2,900 words.

What is gender inequality?

Gender inequality is defined as “social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously under similar circumstances on the basis of gender.” Gender inequality is a problem faced by almost every country. Only in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark do women have legal, social and economic rights that are roughly equal to those of men. Even here in Ireland, a country which would be considered as highly developed, women do not have equal legal social and economic rights to men. This is something that should be considered highly unacceptable in this day and age.

Gender equality is measured using the gender empowerment measure (GEM). It measures inequalities in 3 different areas: political participation, economic participation and decision making, and power regarding economic resources. Below is a graph showing the gender inequality of different regions of the earth as measured by the World Bank.



Source: World Bank, 2001.

(OECD includes 34 countries from North and South America to Europe and the Asia-Pacific region)

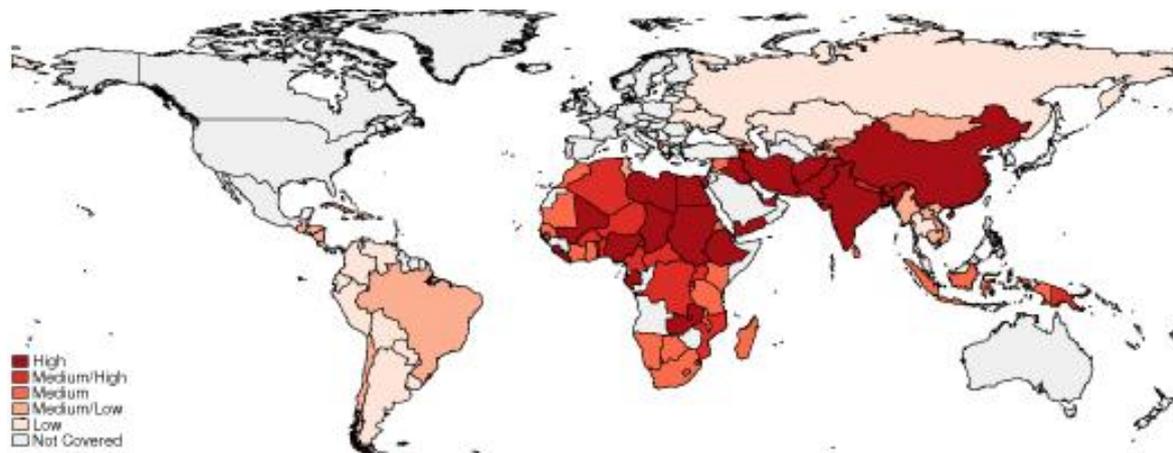
Studies have shown that women earn only 10% of the world's income even though they work 2/3rd's of the working hours of the world. This is because women spend so much time doing unpaid work for the family, something that men should be doing more of. Women own less than 2% of all property on earth. In many countries less than 10% of women hold title to their land. Women produce 60-80% of food crops in the world and are generally unpaid for doing this work.

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Developing Countries.

The gap between the rights of men and women is much bigger in developing countries than it is in developed countries. The largest gap can be seen in Africa and South Asia. The World Bank has pointed out that gender differences are greatest among the poorest families. In poor families resources are not shared equally within the family. Instead they are shared in accordance with the power and influence of the individuals in the family. This is not fair on the family as a unit.

It has been shown that gender inequality in education has quite a significant impact on economic growth. It is a very important factor contributing to the poor growth performance of Africa and South Asia over the last 30 years or so. Gender equality not only increases the growth of a country but also promotes other very important developmental goals such as lower fertility and lower child mortality. These would lead to a decrease in population growth and would allow the environmental sustainability of areas to increase. In this case gender inequality, by preventing

women and girls from getting an education of a level equal to that of men and boys, has impeded sustainable development in a huge way. The social development is affected because women a woman status in her family is reduced. The economic development is affected because a woman with no education is rarely able to have any sort of noticeable impact on the economy of her country. The environmental sustainability is affected because women would not be educated on matters involving the environment and so would not realise the negative impact that they may be making on it.



(Gender inequality by region)

In developing countries and especially in rural areas of developing countries women and girl's collect more natural resources for household use than their male counterparts. Often when women are allowed access to community decisions about the management of wood, water and other natural resources there is an increase in the environmental sustainability. In many cases women are not allowed access to such community decisions. This is not sustainable and in the future it will become much more difficult for that community to manage these natural resources. They will hopefully realise that they are impeding the sustainable development of the community by not letting the women participate in the decision making. This is another area where gender inequality has negatively impacted the environmental sustainability of an area.

An Example - Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Bangladesh.

Roughly half of Bangladesh's population is made up of women and about 80% of these women live in rural areas. Women do most of the work at home and play an important part of generating the income for the family. However their contribution to the national economy is mostly unaccounted for. Bangladesh is a very patriarchal society and inequality between men and women is present at all levels of community. This means that women are not considered as important parts of

society. In this case gender inequality has impeded the social development of the country.



The women in Bangladesh are dependent on men for their entire lives whether it is on their fathers, husbands or sons. Men and boys have much better access to educations, health care and their financial assets than women and girls. A society where women do not have equal access to things such as this is not a sustainable society.

Women's participation in politics and administration was very poor in the past. To date however it has increased. There is a provision for 3 out of 12 seats to be reserved for women in the Union Council and 3 to 5 out of 12 to 15 for municipalities. Bangladesh has had two women prime ministers to date. Increasing the number of women in positions of power such as this will hopefully be good for all off the women in Bangladesh and for Bangladesh itself. This should cause the development of Bangladesh to increase as women in power should have a positive effect on the empowerment of women and so decrease the divide between men and women in the country.

Bangladesh is heavily dependent on groundwater as the ever increasing population is causing more and more damage to the open resources like surface water in rivers and lakes. Groundwater is used for drinking water, irrigation, industry and tourism. Reports suggest a decline of the groundwater level of about 1 m every year. This is an alarmingly high rat. In the near future it will cause huge problems for the people in and around the centre of Dhaka. If women in Bangladesh were properly educated in the past the country might not be facing this problem. The fertility rate would have dropped and so the population would not have increased at such a fast rate. Less

damage would then have been done to the open resources and the environmental sustainability of Bangladesh would not be at the low level it is at today.

Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development in Developed Countries

Gender inequality is not as big an issue in developed countries as in developing countries however it still exists. We saw earlier that the only countries where women have legal, social and economic rights that are completely equal to those of men are Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.



In other developed countries the gap between men and women is decreasing constantly but it should be non-existent. In developed countries governments provide more funding to male jobs and projects than to female jobs and projects. Studies have shown that in many countries funding for production and services has very often gone to goods and services which are more important to men than to women. For example funding is given to measures for dealing with external threats rather than male violence against women.

An Example- Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Norway

In 2008 Norway topped the world list of the countries with the highest gender equality. Norway has a high percentage of women serving as representatives in the Norwegian national assembly. The Norwegian Parliament passed a law in 2003 which required that 40% of all company board members be women. 75% of women aged between 25 and 66 are on the workforce (For men the figure is 82 %.) Overall on earth the percentage of women in the workforce is 60%. The percentage of women with small children who are working is also very high.



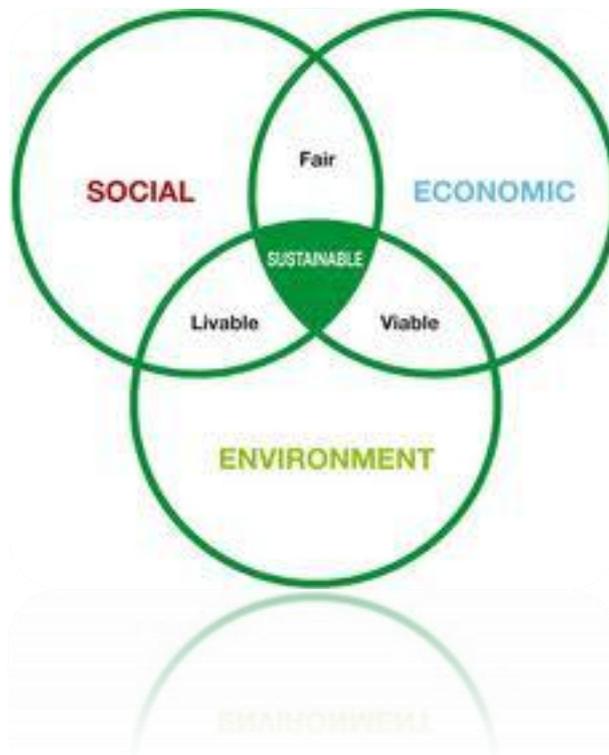
In Norway women are on an equal footing with men in the areas of divorce, custody of children and the right to property. In 1978 The Equal Status Act was introduced. It prohibited all discrimination on the basis of gender. However in Norway some inequalities remain. For example they have problems with violence against women, prostitution and the rights of immigrant and indigenous women.

Norway makes a large impact on issues of sustainable development. It is the second most environmentally friendly country in the world. Norway provides 1% of their GDP for these issues. It can be no coincidence that a country with such high gender equality has such a high level of sustainable development.

What is sustainable development?

Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” For sustainable development to be a viable possibility the earth must be

seen as a system. Each person's needs need to be taken into account and it must be considered that actions in one part of the earth will have consequences in another part. For example pollution from North America affects the quality of the air in Asia, and pesticides that are sprayed on crops in Argentina could harm the fish stocks off the coast of Australia. Sustainable development involves the equal development of social, economic and environmental areas.



Women and Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability “focuses on development, not simply growth. This implies economic activity that is conducive to, and supports, sustainable human development. Economic sustainability is a means to a much broader end - sustainable human growth. It also requires the use of appropriate technologies. Economic sustainability encourages the use of renewable resources as inputs to production. It actively discourages the generation of externalities arising from economic activity, such as air, water and soil pollution. It refers to development and adoption of new technologies, transition from agriculture based to industry based economy, and general improvement in living standards.”

Studies have shown that in most of the world women spend more hours working than men. However they spend a large amount of time doing housework which is unpaid and therefore not taken into account when economists measure the amount of work done by males and females. Even women who have full time jobs do the majority of the housework in the household. In most countries women occupy a very small percentage of the decision making positions in the economic area. They make

up 10% to 30% of managers in the private sector and less than 5% of the very highest positions.



It is much more likely that a woman will spend her income on the needs of her family than a man will. This has very positive effects on the wellbeing of the family. Over their lifetime women and girls will reinvest 90% of their income into their families and communities compared to only 30-40% for a man. That's huge difference of 50-60%. The percentage that the man would be investing in his family would not be sustainable on its own.

Women often face a metaphorical glass ceiling when they try and enter the workplace or political life. Men often find it much easier to rise through the levels of the workplace while women often find it difficult to reach the same heights. Even when a woman can gain the same job as a man they can find it hard to get the same responsibilities as a man.

Women and Social Sustainability

The definition of social sustainability says that “Social sustainability reflects the relationship between development and current social norms. An activity is socially sustainable if it conforms to social norms or does not stretch them beyond the community’s tolerance for change. Social norms are based on religion, tradition, and custom; they are rooted in values attached to human health and well-being.”



Educating women is the best and most powerful way to change their position in society. Education reduces inequality and it also improves a woman's status in their family. It reduces their dependency on men and gives them a more sustainable lifestyle. Girls in developing countries are rarely given the same opportunities in education as boys. They are more likely than boys to drop out of school to help their mothers with the work in the family home. As I said earlier the social sustainability of a country increases when women are given the chance at a good education.

Women and Environmental Sustainability



Environmental sustainability is “the maintenance of the factors and practices that contribute to the quality of environment on a long-term basis” Van de Hombergh said that “In literature on women, environment and development, women are either regarded as the victims of environmental degradation or as the best managers of the environment.”

In the past the role of men involvement with the environment has out shadowed that of women. However it is finally being realised that women of ever social class, nation and colour have been for years raising their concerns about the environment.

Bella Abzug (who was one of the founders and regional co-chairs of U.S. based Women's Environment and Development Organization otherwise known as WEDO) said “women by their increasingly nature-focused activities want to prove to the world that they can make a difference, and be a powerful force for positive changes in the environment and the world around them.”

Women cause considerably fewer CO₂ emissions than men (and so considerably less climate change) because they travel less than men by car, plane, boat and motorcycle. They also buy less carbon intensive goods. Women in industrialised countries are more likely to buy ecologically friendly foods as well as organic foods than men. They are also more likely to recycle. They are more interested in efficient energy use. This means that women have a more positive impact on the environmental sustainability of the earth than men do.

However women, and especially women who live in developing countries, are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of global warming. In many developing countries women make up a large part of the agricultural workforce. They also have less access to income generating opportunities than men. Women manage the households and care for family members meaning that their mobility is limited. Because of this they become are more vulnerable to weather related disasters than men. Drought and erratic rainfall forces women to work harder to provide food, water and energy for their families.

In developing countries women can play a major role in the conservation and the restoration of the environment. Women living in rural areas use unconventional and nature friendly sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood.

So In Short How Does Gender Inequality Impede Sustainable Development?

On completion of this essay I believe that it is easy to see that gender inequality clearly impedes sustainable development. When women are given the same opportunities as men the countries in which they live become much more environmentally, socially and economically stable. We can see that in developed countries such as Norway where gender equality is high the country is very sustainable. In developing countries such as Bangladesh where the gender gap is much larger the sustainability is much lower.



Women can give a great deal to the sustainability of their country, even more than men it would seem, when they are given the same opportunities as the men.

Providing women with a good education and equal rights gives them the chance to make a difference- something it is obvious they are able to do. However it appears that you also need a certain amount of economic development before the gender equality increases. This is evident because the gender equality in developed countries is so much higher than that in developing countries. In conclusion I in my opinion gender equality and sustainable development come hand in hand; you can't have one without the other and in order for one to increase the other needs to increase. Hopefully in the future countries will see that gender inequality really does impede sustainable development. They can then make moves to increase the gender equality in their country and hand in hand with this the sustainable development.

Conclusion

After somehow getting through the whole 12 pages of this essay I'm glad to say that I feel like I've learned a good bit about gender inequality and sustainable development and how they can affect each other. It really took a while to sift through all the information and find the relevant bits but now that I'm finished it seemed worth it. It was definitely harder than I thought it was going to be because even though there was a good bit of information out there quite a lot of it was irrelevant or way too detailed for an essay of this length. And I've realised that reading (or scanning through) 90 page reports is really not fun! Especially when you don't find anything relevant at the end of it.

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