

Addressing Gender in the Sustainable Development Agenda

Gender and the Sustainable Development Agenda

The Post-2015 Development Agenda, agreed to by the member states of the United Nations in September 2015, contains a strong equity message, as it pledges to leave no one behind in the development process. In support of this pledge, the ambitious Agenda for Sustainable Development proposes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that seek to provide a holistic base for development by addressing all three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental development. Addressing gender inequality is a core element of this agenda as it is a stand-alone goal as well as a consistent theme that runs across several other goals as well.

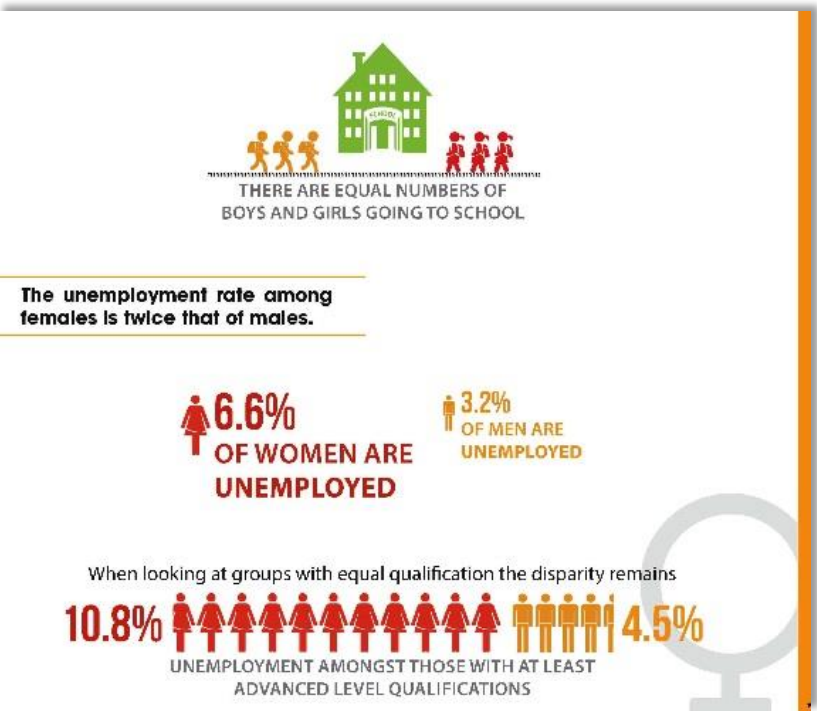


Under the SDG Framework, Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls by 2030. This is envisioned as a world in which:

- women and girls are not **discriminated** against in any form;
- women are not subject to **violence** in either the public or private spheres;
- **harmful cultural practices** such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation are eliminated;
- **domestic work** is recognized and valued;
- women are able to **fully participate** in decision-making;
- especially in the political and economic spheres; and
- women have **access to reproductive health** and their reproductive rights are protected.

In addition, the SDGs commit governments everywhere to 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, **enhance the use of enabling technology**, in particular information and communications technology, to **promote the empowerment of women**, and 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.¹

No Discrimination
No Violence
Participation
Freedom
Rights
Protection



The SDG Framework, and the goals and targets within it, underscore the inter-connectedness of development issues such as gender inequality. In addition to the stand alone Goal 5, the SDG framework includes gender-sensitive targets in other goals (Box 1). This reflects the understanding that gender equality and women’s empowerment cannot be addressed without addressing these other targets as well. It also recognizes that elimination of gender based discrimination and women’s equality and empowerment is a critical pre-condition for the achievement of these other targets.

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Box 1: Interconnections in Gender and Development

Goal 5 contains the target to ensure women’s **full and effective participation** and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life. However, this target is linked to other targets such as eradication of **poverty (Goal 1)**, access to **education and skills for all (Goal 4)**, opportunities for **economic growth and decent work (Goal 8)**, elimination of discriminatory laws and policies (**Goal 10**), increased **capacities among women** to participate in and address issues relating to the environment such as climate change (**Goal 13**) and the need for legal **protection from discrimination and violence (Goal 16)**. The SDG framework shows clearly that these goals are connected, and one cannot be achieved without the other.



Overall, the SDGs seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and go beyond what the MDGs achieved. In relation to gender, MDGs focused on eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education, especially primary and secondary levels and it was expected that the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament would increase with progress under this goal. Yet, a UN women report (2015)² done in 130 countries show that only 2 have achieved gender parity at all levels of education. Globally, 40 out of 100 wage-earning jobs in the non-agricultural sector are held by women, but women everywhere still enter the labour market on an unequal basis to men, even after accounting for educational background and skills. Progress is most disappointing in relation to female representation in national parliaments where women continue to form a disproportionate minority.² In recognition of this slow progress, the SDGs propose to go above and beyond the SDGs, by proposing a more holistic and interconnected approach to gender and development to address these intransigent issues in our societies.

Sri Lanka: the Vision and Current Realities

In Sri Lanka too, gender inequality takes many forms. While there is gender parity in enrollment at primary, secondary and tertiary education (Figure 1), there has not been a significant improvement in economic empowerment and political participation of women during the past 15 years.³ The current realities in Sri Lanka in relation to several key SDGs and targets reveal the challenges of addressing gender inequality.

² Progress towards meeting the MDGs for women and girls – UN Women (2015)

² Progress towards meeting the MDGs for women and girls – UN Women (2015)

³ Sri Lanka Millennium Development Country Report 2014 – UNDP (2014)

SDG TARGET	CURRENT REALITY
1.4 - By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.	Women who are poor include war widows, female headed households (FHH), women in the plantation sector, women with disabilities, elderly, unskilled/informal workers, and migrant workers. Just 36% of the women are economically active with only 13% as employers, while 78% are unpaid family labourers. Women's work tend to be mainly in the agriculture, elementary and production sectors as well as professionals (mainly teachers, nurses). ⁴
5.1- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	Wage gaps exists and are worst in the informal sector where men get as much as 40% more and in the private sector where men get paid 20% more than females. ⁵ Care responsibilities, transport and safety issues, and social attitudes discriminate against women's right to work.
5.2- 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.	Violence against women is widespread and increasing in Sri Lanka and range from rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, incest, child abuse, assault, obscenity, perverted acts, forced prostitution and pornography. A recent study reports 1194 cases of rape in 2012; 2600 sexual harassment cases in 2011; and 94,000 cases of domestic violence in 2012. ⁶
5.5- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	The Sri Lankan Parliament has never had more than 6% of female representatives. ⁷ A violent political culture and gender biases among the political parties and the populace act against greater female participation in politics.
5.4 Recognize and value of 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.	Household work and lack of secure child care services are sited most often as the reason women do not work. In addition female workers tend to be as unpaid family workers.
8.5- By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.	Women's employment is high in the informal sector and as migrant domestic workers where there is no legal protection. In formal sectors such as garments and plantations that employ a large share of women, further improvements are needed in working conditions.
8.8 Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.	While 40% of those migrating for employment overseas are women, 82% of the women go as domestic aids while men go mainly as skilled (37%) and unskilled (34%) workers. ⁸ With the exception of Italy, there are no bilateral agreements that protect migrant worker rights at the government levels. Current restrictions banning overseas migration of women with children under, impacts not only on women's right to mobility for paid work, but also strengthens discriminatory practices.

Clearly Sri Lanka has a long and challenging journey ahead to reach meaningful gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

(Conceptualized in collaboration with the Centre for Poverty Analysis, Sri Lanka)

⁴ Labour Force Survey – Annual Bulletin 2015 – Department of Census and Statistics (2015)

⁵ To work or not to work? Factors holding women back from market work in Sri Lanka – Ramani Gunetilleke (2013)

⁶ Report by the Leader of the Opposition's Commission on the prevention of Violence against women and the girl child (2014)

⁷ Sri Lankan Women in Politics – Chapa Perera (2015)

⁸ Different Perspectives of Departure Details - Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2013)