

A gender-sensitive approach results in more equitable and efficient development; it also puts less strain on the environment, and is therefore more sustainable

Gender Equality & Sustainable Development

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT
BRIEFING NOTES



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Why are gender equality issues important for sustainable development?

Reducing poverty today, without environmental degradation and social and economic inequalities tomorrow, cannot be achieved or sustained without paying careful attention to gender-based differences. More often, women and girls bear the burden of gender disparities. Because of their socially-constructed roles, men and boys usually have an advantage over women and girls in access to resources, decision-making, and capacity to take advantage of social, political, and economic opportunities. To enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of development interventions, these differences need to be understood and factored into policies and programs.

An important element of sustainable development is the need to manage the natural resource base on which human activity depends. Due to the gender division of labor in society, women and men have different needs and uses for natural resources. The different responsibilities imposed by societies on females and males have implications for how they interact with their local environment.

Women's and men's different responsibilities and roles are evident in many sectors, including the following:

- Agriculture, especially at the subsistence level;
- Water, especially water for household use;
- Domestic energy in urban and rural settings for a variety of end-uses; and
- Forests, especially their sustainable use.

Knowledge of the gender division of labor in a community can be used to help assess the gender-differentiated impacts of environmental conditions and how women and men can contribute to, exacerbate, or help to solve environmental problems. A fuller understanding of the gender and natural resource management connections, such as which gender group values a given natural resource and for what reason (food security, medicinal purposes, community needs, etc.), can have positive effects on sustainable development interventions for poverty reduction.

Issues to consider

- What are the different responsibilities, roles and needs of women and men in sectors related to sustainable development, such as food production, water and sanitation, shelter, forest resources management, and energy?
- Do women and men value or use particular natural resources for different community needs and what impacts do these uses have for sustainable management and environmental protection in a particular community?
- Who are the main stakeholders in natural resources management and use, and do these stakeholders have a voice in decision-making, planning and design of development interventions?
- Is a specific development project sustainable, given the responses to the different needs of women and men that it proposes (if any)?

The role of the World Bank

The World Bank's mission of sustainable and equitable poverty reduction has strong gender and environmental content. The mandates for gender mainstreaming and environmentally and socially sustainable development cut across the World Bank's work. Both mandates encourage a cooperative and interdisciplinary approach to decision making, and both are dimensions that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of World Bank interventions.

In the past few years, the World Bank has taken several important steps to make gender equality central in its fight against poverty. It has taken intellectual leadership in outlining the empirical links between gender, public policy, and development effectiveness through its 2001 publication *Engendering Development – Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*. In 2001, it adopted both a gender mainstreaming strategy and an environment strategy.

The environment strategy, *Making Sustainable Commitments: An Environment Strategy for the World Bank*, stresses the importance of ensuring that environmental concerns are fully internalized throughout the Bank's work. The strategy seeks to strengthen the environmental links to dimensions of poverty, such

as enhancing livelihoods, reducing environmental health risks and reducing people's vulnerability to environmental hazards.

Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

The World Bank's 2001 Gender Mainstreaming Strategy is a critical step in supporting countries to implement their gender and development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The strategy calls for the preparation of a country gender assessment (CGA) for each country in which the Bank has an active lending program. CGAs provide a basis for integrating gender issues into policy dialogue with governments and into other elements of the Bank's country assistance program. Because gender issues cut across all aspects of the economy and society, CGAs present an excellent opportunity to integrate gender into the Bank's work, by examining a range of substantive areas (such as agriculture, education, energy, the environment, rural development, transport, and water and sanitation) to ensure that priority gender-related development issues are adequately identified.

The strategy is available online at:

www.worldbank.org/gender/overview/ssp/home.htm

There are many synergies between the environment and gender strategies. For example, reducing people's vulnerability to environmental health hazards, through improved access to safe water and better air quality, can also help to empower women by reducing the demands on their time.

Examples from World Bank projects

The Bank's portfolio is increasingly integrating gender considerations and participatory approaches into project design and implementation. Bank-financed projects show that policies and actions can contribute to sustainable development by decreasing the demand on women's time and effort to provide food, clean water, and fuel. They also show that early consultations with female and male stakeholders and taking measures to ensure their effective participation in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of development initiatives, can significantly improve development outcomes.

The **China Sustainable Forestry Development Project** is designed to promote the sustainable use of forests through a participatory and locally-managed conservation system. It also aims to improve income generating opportunities for rural households.

Women and ethnic minorities comprise a large share of the project's approximately 2.75 million target population. The consultation process for this project actively sought the views of women, who identified their needs for access to drinking water, education, village roads, and small animal raising. Women who were unemployed identified vocational training as an important need. These needs will be incorporated into project activities.

The **Ecuador Poverty Reduction and Local Rural Development Project (PROCAL)** seeks to improve the well-being of poor households through increased access to assets and improved quality of local services. Thirty percent of individuals participating in the planning process are women. A project sub-component includes an awareness campaign to address social inequalities between women and men, and to ensure that women's needs and priorities are reflected in local development plans. The project has drawn on findings from a gender review commissioned by the Bank, which found that poor people, particularly women, have limited access to the formal labor, land and credit markets, and lack the means for effective participation in public decision making.

The Benin Community-Based Food Security Project

The **Benin Community-Based Food Security Project** is an example of a women-oriented intervention aimed at food security solutions through the empowerment of local communities. The project's gender-responsive approach to community involvement in project planning and implementation contributed to its overall success. The project helped to improve regular access to food by vulnerable households through agricultural, fisheries, peri-urban, and socioeconomic activities that offered new income generating opportunities.

Partnerships

The World Bank partners with institutions in sectors such as agriculture, water, energy, and rural development, where differentiated gender roles are pronounced and relevant for sustainable and equitable poverty reduction. For example, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank supports the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Other partnerships include the World Bank/UNDP Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), and the Water and Sanitation Program.