

Gender Equality as a Precondition for Meeting Various Challenges like Reducing Poverty, Promoting Sustainable Development and Good Governance: A Discussion

Fatiimah Waariithah Ahsan
Barrister at Law, Hon'ble Society of the Inner Temple
LLB (Hons.),
MA International Studies & Diplomacy,
LLM Oil and Petroleum Law,
Accredited Civil & Commercial Mediator.

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Introduction:

Gender equality and poverty are presented as two interrelated parameters. There is a negative correlation between the two concepts (Accordingly, when gender equality is enhanced, poverty decreases). The United Nations have religiously been there to tackle poverty, provide good governance and minimize the gender inequality gap. Much of the talk with gender equality and tackling poverty now is in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the focus on development. Goal 5 of the SDGs is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. But how far are these goals being achieved is still a growing question to debate about.

Amid all the discussion about inequality, gender voices are still a grey issue in many sectors. Even within the UN, most of the high-level policy debates are composed of men. There are not many women in the conversation. Gender inequalities vary considerably between goals. While young women in Africa are between two and four times more likely than their male contemporaries to be infected with HIV, globally girls are no more likely than boys to be underweight. In Bangladesh, it's the poorest boys who are less likely to go to school than the poorest girls.

Gender is just one of a multiplicity of inequalities that combine to form the patterns of poverty and exclusion that we see in the world today. Other inequalities are also hugely significant. In Vietnam, for example, only 7% of ethnic minority households have access to improved sanitation, while the figure for the majority Kinh and Chinese groups is 43%. In India, more than 90% of rich urban women have a skilled attendant with them when they give birth, but for poor rural women, the figure is less than 20%.

Gender equality is one of the most important branches of development in the world more so in the developing nations. It has created much buzz in recent times than ever before. What really is gender equality is an objective question. Is it the same rights for both the sexes or is it having to recognize the male and female values as the same or is it having the same pay scale for both male and female? Typically, when talking about gender equality, scholars, writers, bloggers and activists are concerned with giving women the same or similar rights as men. The issue is are men superior to women and whether this male-dominated society is decelerating sustainable development and good Governance.

The state of gender equality is complex and debatable and often feminism comes hand in hand with gender equality. Women across the globe continue to make remarkable strides towards equality and continue to face resistance and adverse response as they do so. The degree of seriousness of this issue is more common in Africa, South Asia and Latin America. One trend which is positive about this issue is that policymakers and businesses are becoming more cognizant of the economic implications of gender equality (for example, the benefits of increasing the representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce and of gender inclusive workplaces). The United Nations have always wanted to do as much for the same or the better.

SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

One way of developing a country's workforce is through active citizen roles. If the citizens of the countries work towards maintaining a civil society, a lot of our problems get resolved. From societies to communities to nation-wide approach developing a workforce is only attainable when citizens become conscious. The men and women should come together to confront national issues and thus working towards building a better future. At the same time, there should be strong institutional roles to encourage men and women towards nation building. Gender plays a huge role and in the Indian subcontinent, those privileged should come together and build communities and institutions in promoting and addressing gender equality issues. During the late twentieth century, the issue of gender equality became a major issue on the global agenda. The UN Decade for Women, which ended in 1985, initiated the integration of women into development, triggering the formation of thousands of women's organisations and networking them across the world. The trend accelerated during the following decade. In 1993, the Vienna World Conference proclaimed that women's rights were human rights; in 1994, the Cairo International Conference

on Population and Development placed women's empowerment and health at the centre of sustainable development programs. Two years later, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women adopted a platform seeking to promote and protect the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women. Although there has been substantial progress toward gender equality in much of the world, great disparities persist, as systematic indicators demonstrate.

In many places, most women's lives remain wretched. Afghanistan was among the most oppressive regimes, with women and girls living under an extreme version of Islamic Law introduced by the Taliban. They were denied education, barred from the workplace and unable to venture out in public without a male companion and the full head-to-toe covering of the burqa. They also suffered from limited access to health care including laws forbidding treatment of women by male practitioners and pervasive threats of domestic and state-legitimated violence. Few regimes are so draconian, but women in many societies face endemic and substantial gender gaps in the division of household responsibilities, limited access to educational opportunities, economic resources as well as legal and political barriers to positions of political power. Much has been talked about and with the global agenda of gender equality, there have been some developments in the sectors. Halima Askari became the first woman head of the Provincial Council in Afghanistan's conservative Wardak province in 2017. She is in politics and ran for national Parliament. She is dedicated to working towards girl's and women's education. She is an example of the new generation of women leaders. Something like this could not be thought about even 10 years back in a country like Afghanistan.

Some societies have experienced a mixture of progress and regression, as new entrepreneurial opportunities arose for women following market liberalisation in post-Communist Europe, along with weakened social safety nets for poorer families. By contrast, other countries have achieved major gains in legal, economic, and political gender equality that are probably irreversible. Sweden exemplifies a society where women experience the highest level of parliamentary representation of any nation in the world, along with gender parity in secondary schooling and paid employment and extensive parental rights and childcare facilities. Although such contrasts in women's lives around the globe are well established, the reasons for them are not.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit took place on the 25 September 2015, more than 150 world leaders adopted the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will support governments around the world in tackling the new agenda and taking it forward over the next 15 years. The 17 new SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, aims to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, build strong institutions and partnerships, and more. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015. Since the MDGs were adopted in 2000, enormous progress has been made, but more needs to be done. Since their adoption, the SDGs have become the framework for development cooperation globally not only under the umbrella of the UN but also by local and international organizations and bilateral donors. The issue of gender equality stemmed for decades and has built up more from MDGs to SDGs. It shall be understood that gender equality is vital for development and can be achieved by promoting gender equality and empowering women.

GENDER EQUALITY GOALS: HOW SUCCESSFUL OR UNSUCCESSFUL CERTAIN NATIONS HAVE BEEN

Law and Media play a huge role in gender equality. Today we have more resources and platform to speak for ourselves. Various human rights organisation and human rights activists have shown huge results in bringing out voices from those oppressed. For example, the growth of militancy and extremism has almost paralyzed the whole state of Iraq. There is a relatively higher rate of discrimination and gender inequality in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Various development in the legal sector, national and international NGOs, Human Rights Commission and law against domestic violence has brought certain changes in KRI. Although there has been some progress there

still remains girls and women who face female genital mutilation, sexual violence, rape and honour killing. Nadia Murad was awarded the Nobel peace prize for her efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. She brought huge pride in Iraqi women and many would now be encouraged to work towards gender equality no matter what their circumstances are. I would like to point out here that taking steps towards building a better future through various human rights activities, law and order, campaigning can bring positive changes in any society.

The UN along with many organisations have been successful in many ways in promoting gender equality. In the day and age of technology when #metoo movement stormed the internet more and more women came out of their shell to advocate for sexual harassment. This is the power of technology and development that once a movement starts it is now much convenient for women to voice their issues with like-minded people around the globe.

NEPAL:

NEPAL has been suffering from socio-economic conflicts since decades now and with the issue of gender inequality in Nepal, it has made things worse and being born as a girl was looked into as a curse in many rural areas of Nepal. The new Constitution formulated after the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990 described Nepal as a multiethnic, multi-lingual and democratic and declared all citizens as equal. Aasland, Aadne and Marit Haug. 2008.

Nepal has undertaken a number of international commitments to nondiscrimination, gender equality, and social justice. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was ratified by Nepal in 1991, includes articles on the elimination of discrimination in public life, civil status, education, employment, health care, and other aspects of social and economic life. Parties to the convention must report every 4 years to a United Nations (UN) committee on the measures they have taken to give effect to the convention.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MWCSW) is the key ministry for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Most development partners have adopted gender equality and social inclusion as cross-cutting issues in their programs. UN agencies and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation are among the agencies that have developed workforce diversity policies to promote inclusiveness in their organizations. Although so much has been said and done there is still a long way to go until Nepal reaches gender equality through all avenues. Even at this day and age and after so much of debates, there is a tradition in Nepal where a menstruating woman is considered as impure. It is a centuries-old ritual called chaupadi, prevalent in far and mid-western regions of Nepal. "During menstruation and childbirth, women are isolated to a cowshed, hut, barn or cave because they are believed to be impure - their touch is said to contaminate - resulting in doom for the family, neighbours and domestic animals."

"Aruna Uprety, a doctor and women's health rights activist, calls chaupadi a form of gender violence and the "most degrading" cultural practice in Nepal. She has written a book called *Chaupadi: a Harmful Practice for Women*. Discriminating against women because of their bodies' natural processes is a crime, she says. "We cannot identify the perpetrator as man or woman. The religious and cultural leaders are to blame."

The dread of divine wrath cuts across class, caste, education and ideological divisions. "Imagine the shame and mental agony when school officials, your family, your whole community keeps account of your menstruation cycle," Uprety says. Some women pray for early menopause; others gulp down Depo-Provera, a contraceptive that temporarily halts menstruation.

In recent times, feminist groups and developmental agencies have published booklets and posters and launched radio programmes and awareness drives in communities and schools. Nowadays, in some villages, women sleep in a separate room in the main house instead of in outhouses. But they are still untouchable. "The government banned it, but there is not a single case of punishment, fine or reprimanding," Uprety adds. Feelings of insecurity, guilt and

humiliation, as well as sadness and depression, are also experienced by women practicing chaupadi. An NGO worker interviewed in Dadeldhura reported that drunkards sometimes go to chaupadi sheds and sexually abuse the women staying in them. Such incidents are rarely reported due to stigma.

The practice of chaupadi challenges fundamental human rights in that it promotes discrimination and increases vulnerability. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims the entitlement of everyone to enjoy equal dignity, rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction of any kind, including sex, religion, political or another opinion, national or social origin, birth or another status. For decades women have been deprived of the same property rights as men, women were also prevented from transmitting citizenship to their children. Nepal's revised constitution and the Gender Equality Act 2006 have strengthened these provisions in favour of women but there

is still a long way to go until Nepalese women receive the right honour they deserve. There has been an unequal development in Nepal due to issues like this. Although there has been a reduction in poverty in the country but the poverty rates among excluded groups remained higher than the national average.

As discussed earlier gender inequality is indeed a complex issue and it seems like in many unfortunate parts of the world not only men are discriminating towards women but even older women with cynical mind set are also discriminating towards younger women. It seems like although policy making can help balance gender equality but at the same time there needs to be strong counselling for communities to change their cynical and violent beliefs for the better. In the past 5 decades, Nepal did make some progress towards better gender equality and have planned development. There has also been development through legislations and amendments have been made to strengthen women's rights in avenues such as citizenship, inheritance, and anti-trafficking. The health and education sector has also seen development and lately, the political representation and participation of excluded groups have been ensured in all governance structures.

BANGLADESH:

Since the World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 – which was a milestone in the battle for equality – Bangladesh has been at the forefront among the least-developed countries (LDCs) in addressing gender disparities. Bangladesh has the eighth lowest gender gap in political empowerment in the world. This is partially due to the fact that it has had a female head of state for longer than any other country in the world. Women's growing presence in the political sphere has had important implications for the family structure. Society is moving away from the traditional view that women are an economic liability and that sons are more desirable than daughters. Studies show that the growing independence of women is one of the major causes of a decline in the “missing women” phenomenon – gender-based infanticide – in Bangladesh.

In the economic sphere, women have played a vital role as well, as evidenced by the importance of the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. While the share of men and women employed in manufacturing is roughly the same, the vast majority of RMG sector workers are women – 80-85 per cent. And, Bangladesh's economic success in the last two decades is in large part due to the RMG exports to Europe and North America.

Despite the fact that women do not generally have ownership over land and tools necessary for agriculture, their labour has been a vital part of the success Bangladesh has had in agricultural productivity – the country stands out compared with other countries in Asia in terms of enhancing agricultural productivity.

In addition, Bangladesh has experienced significant improvements in women's health over the past three decades. Women's life expectancy, for example, increased from 54.3 years in 1980 to 69.3 years in 2010, one of the largest increases in the region.

In the social sphere, Bangladesh is a textbook example of what is possible when women are involved in decision-making. Indeed, it is a heartening story of social innovation and development, in no small part due to the help of micro-finance, which has played an integral role in rural and social development in Bangladesh – 92 per cent of the borrowers are women and 90 per cent lives in rural areas.

While there is some debate over the efficacy of micro-finance in poverty reduction, studies have shown that in Bangladesh, female participation in microfinance activities has led to an increased sense of empowerment, measured by factors such as decision-making, social acceptance and political involvement, which in turn have led to general welfare improvements.

Take for example the fact that Bangladeshi mothers increasingly have a say on their children's education. The country has managed to reduce the gender gap at all levels of education, particularly at lower levels of education, i.e. youth literacy and secondary school enrolments. In these two areas, disparities have been reduced at a faster rate in Bangladesh than the global average.

Amid all this development, the challenge remains for Bangladeshi women. Women are still victims of domestic violence, receive lower wages than men and victims of sexual assault. Women are also disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable employment. The Bangladeshi government, employers and workers organisations are making important strides in the right direction, with the support of the ILO and many development partners, but still, a lot needs to be done. Like any other developing nations, there is a significant gap between the lifestyle of urban women in Bangladesh than those living in rural areas. Issues like early marriage, domestic violence and sexual violence still exist. UNDP has done a vast amount of work to promote and empower women in Bangladesh and they have been quite successful in it. With the education sector, Bangladesh has been doing well with girl's education more than ever before. To eradicate poverty, get sustainable development and good governance which goes hand in hand with gender equality, there should be gender-responsive labour market policies that would pave the way for more equitable employment outcomes and decent work for all. Gender-based awareness and gender equality are one of the main tools of eradicating poverty, promote development and good governance. Bangladesh is one of the examples of such policies.

AFRICA:

While Asia and the Pacific region is not without problems, the story of Africa is much grimmer. Of all regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people living in poverty. Some 300 million people face the daily struggle of surviving on less than \$1 PPP a day. Between the 1990s and 1999, the number of poor in the region increased by one-quarter, or over six million per year. In 2010, for every 100 boys, there were only 82 girls. 15 sub-Saharan countries are financed by UN schemes for girls' school places. Many NGOs also finance girls education in that region. A charity named Camfed finances almost 100,000 girls to be educated in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

"While progress is being made in sub-Saharan Africa in primary education, gender inequality is, in fact, widening among older children. The ratio of girls enrolled in primary school rose from 85 to 93 per 100 boys between 1999 and 2010, whereas it fell from 83 to 82 and from 67 to 63 at the secondary and tertiary levels."

In certain regions, the progress has been very poor. In fact, in some places, there has been no progress at all. According to the Economist, in Chad and the Central African Republic the enrolment ratio is under 70 girls per 100 boys. However, according to the Economist, Afghanistan has performed the worst in the world on this particular metric. In rural areas of some countries, the problem is much worse, especially in some African rural areas. For instance, in certain areas, it is much more inconvenient, dangerous and time-consuming to get to school.

According to UN Women, the East African country has long shown some of the lowest indicators of gender equality in sub-Saharan Africa. "Women and girls in Ethiopia are strongly disadvantaged compared to boys and men in

several areas, including literacy, health, livelihoods and basic human rights." Female genital mutilation continues in some areas despite the government declaring it illegal. But the new prime minister has clearly decided to include women's leadership in the sweeping political and economic reforms he has announced in Africa's second most populous country since taking office in April last year. Ethiopian lawmakers unanimously elected the country's first female president days after approving one of the world's few "gender-balanced" Cabinets as the country's dramatic reforms continue.

The new president said she will focus on bringing together all sides to achieve peace in a country where multiple ethnic-based conflicts have simmered in recent months as political dialogue opens up. This is a huge step in promoting gender equality and through this development, there could be more skilled women and children who would strengthen the country's rule of law and civil liberties. Ethiopian lawmakers have also approved a Cabinet with women making up a record of 50 per cent of ministers, including the country's first female defence minister. A woman also leads the new Ministry of Peace, will oversee the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service and the Federal Police Commission. The Horn of Africa power joined a handful of countries, mostly European, where women make up 50 per cent or more of ministerial positions, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women."

Likely inspired, Rwanda announced its own Cabinet with 50 per cent women. The country has received international recognition for female representation in government. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "The African continent is leading the way in showcasing that women's engagement and leadership are crucial to lasting peace,".

There is always light at the end of the tunnel and working towards sustainable development goals can hugely strengthen a country's civil society and development.

CONCLUSION

"Assessing progress in the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective is a bit like picking up mercury. It all too quickly slips through your fingers. There is often no agreement on what to look for, how to measure progress, how 'high the bar should be'. Until organisations have clear objectives and targets of what they hope to achieve and how they will monitor and measure those achievements, it will be up to evaluators to sort out what they are looking for."

Gender inequality is ubiquitous. Those interested in promoting equality between men and women should rather capitalize on the influence they hold via their roles as friends, parents, family members, political constituents in their workplaces. Although the high profile policies by international organisations hold a huge impact on the development of the society as a whole but mental growth in developing nations is ideal. "The important thing, however, is to do something because research shows that when sexism goes unchallenged, this is interpreted as sexist beliefs being more widely accepted than they actually are, which in turn detracts from individuals' willingness to challenge them."

Good governance and the rule of law benefits a society towards sustainable development. This essay was particularly focused on gender equality which is a key to eradication of poverty, promote sustainable development and good governance. All of these are correlated and in fact, if there is gender equality in society it would automatically mean better and more powerful workforce which would lead to a balance of cash inflows and outflows in the economy and resting in sustainable development. Good governance should ensure a culture of accountability, rewarding good performance and effectively curbing corruption and other vices in society. If there is gender equality in society it would also be better democratic power for the citizens which again would lead to better governance and sustainable development eventually. There should be rule of law, separation of power, effective use of human rights (which has always been an anchor building up from the MDGs to SDGs).

Given the picture, it is established that gender equality is indeed more than just a goal in itself. Much has been achieved in gender equality goals but there is still much more to achieve. Women rights are human rights and although it has become a norm but the world still have to see incidents with the school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria who have reportedly been sold off to men as wives without any rights. Apart from systematic policies and institutions norms, awareness and counselling should be achieved to change the mentality of cynical citizens of the world today. The United Nations along with various other international communities, pressure groups and NOGs have pursued the gender equality issue in many successful ways in its approach to development. Realistically it is not possible to achieve all goals and have a set policy or framework for development. I would conclude by saying that it has been systematically successful with few loops holes here and there. Eradication of poverty, promoting sustainable development and good governance cannot solely be tackled with gender equality as all women are not poor and all that are poor are not woman.

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