
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Candice Stevens is an Economist and a Sustainable Development Consultant in Paris, France. She was previously the Sustainable Development Advisor and also the Chair of the Gender Network at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris. Her other OECD functions included Head of the Industry Division and Head of the Science and Technology Policy Division. Prior to the OECD, she worked for the US Government in the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of the Interior, Department of Commerce and the US Congress.

The global failure to realise the potential economic, social and environmental contributions of women is hindering progress on sustainable development. Sustainability can only be achieved when both women and men are participating fully as workers, managers and consumers. Women generally have different aptitudes, attitudes and sensibilities than men. At present, it is the male perspective which is driving economies, societies and environments in unsustainable directions.

Owing to the global financial crisis, women may now get a chance to share the driver's seat. We are entering an era of re-regulation rather than deregulation, of Fair Trade rather than free trade, of corporate responsibility rather than unfettered competition. These are the values long espoused by women. A feminine perspective on the economy, social development and the environment is needed to get beyond the current crisis to sustainability. Continuing gender gaps are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world.

Sustainable development depends on interrelated investments in five types of capital: financial (stocks, bonds), productive (machinery, infrastructure), natural (ecosystems, resources), human (healthcare, education), and social (good governance, corporate responsibility). US President Barack Obama has made a good start in including measures for the unemployed, healthcare, education and green growth in the US financial stimulus package, but more is needed on the gender front.

Women are being marginalised worldwide, wasting one-half of available human capital and ignoring the feminine perspective. Studies show that better use of women would lead to: increased economic growth, lower poverty levels, greater innovation, enhanced business performance, long-term social stability, and less environmental degradation (OECD, 2008). Gender discrimination, traditional attitudes towards women, and inadequate gender policies are largely to blame for the failure to advance on sustainable development.

The lack of gender-based statistics and analyses underlies this market and systems failure. Companies, think tanks, universities and governments undertake statistical, analytical and policy work without adequate gender differentiation. When a gender perspective is included, the data, findings and policy implications are more complex.

They are also more attuned to the real world and to the needs of future generations and longer-term sustainability.

The papers included in this special *IJISD* issue on Gender and Sustainable Development demonstrate the value of engendered approaches in analysing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The authors, male and female, come from both developed and developing countries in North America, Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. A variety of analytical methods are used – from statistical analysis and surveys through modelling and case studies – to uncover the insights of gender mainstreaming.

Sustainable economic growth depends on more women joining the labour force and contributing their productive and innovative skills. Female participation in the workforce is lower than that of men in all countries owing largely to their heavier household and family duties and negative male attitudes towards working women. When they do work on the economy, women earn less than men due to persistent gender wage gaps. At the same time, women's work in the home is undervalued and not included in national accounting.

As Angela Luci shows in her econometric analysis, economic growth alone will not increase the entry of women into the labour force. Governments need to enact active labour market policies – family-friendly approaches, adequate childcare, equal pay laws – if they want to spur their economies with the help of women. Growth policies must be accompanied by efforts to increase decent and productive work opportunities for women in all countries. Mobilising female labour supply through explicit targets and programmes is key to long-term sustainable growth.

Governments should also give incentives and funding to female researchers to increase R&D and innovation, according to the statistical analysis and modelling of patent data in Europe by Ulrike Busolt and Kordula Kugele. The economic goals of the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union will not be attained if fuller use isn't made of female science and technology personnel, researchers and engineers. The under-representation of women in research and patenting is an unacceptable loss of an intellectual resource. In order to attract women to public and industrial research, more than just targets and encouragement are needed.

The same is true for the innovative performance of companies as demonstrated by Laure Turner's analysis of the output of business R&D teams. The lack of women in R&D departments is costing companies in terms of the development of new technologies, products and approaches. Moreover, women are being excluded from core research projects where the lack of gender diversity is especially detrimental to company performance. A male-centred technology culture and gender stereotypes continue to lower the share of women researchers in both the public and private sectors.

A common misperception is that sustainable development is only about the environment. Yet it is in the ecological realm where gender differences may be most stark. Household surveys consistently show that women are more sustainable than men in their attitudes, behaviour and consumer habits. Women have a greater propensity to buy eco-labeled goods, Fair Trade products, and fuel-efficient vehicles. The lifestyles of men tend to be more resource-intensive than those of women, who strive to lower their ecological and carbon footprints.

Cynthia Isenhour and Matilda Ardenfors show how consumption patterns are distinctly gender-related in a survey of Swedish families. Women spent more time than men seeking information on sustainable consumption and lifestyle alternatives. They

recycled more, ate organic foods, reduced their travel, and purchased green goods. Yet, Swedish women continue to have extensive household and family duties coupled with jobs which make it more difficult for them to maintain sustainable lifestyles. The policy implications are interesting. Countries such as Sweden will not achieve sustainable growth if they leave it up to female consumers. Government policies must also promote sustainable consumption by men and sustainable production by industry. This policy package should include measures to address the time poverty and unequal pay of women.

The same is true in Japan according to a survey of industry and academia by Paul Ofei-Manu. Japanese women tend to be more concerned than men about the environment and the negative impacts of business and personal behaviour. The women surveyed were also willing to pay more for sustainable products than men. And they worried about the environmental damage from the processes being used in their companies and their products. In the male-dominated management culture of Japan, true sustainability initiatives are in short supply and will remain scarce until women participate in decision-making processes.

Although women in the USA tend to consider themselves the most advanced in the world, this is belied by the statistical evidence (Stevens, 2009). The gender pay gap is higher in the USA than the average of OECD countries. American women have far less paid maternity leave and access to childcare than their European counterparts. The Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum assesses how countries divide their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations. On this measure, the USA trails at 31st place while European countries have eight of the top ten rankings (WEF, 2008).

Although women are getting managerial jobs in US business along with men, they are still hitting the ‘glass ceiling’. Regardless of their academic degrees, American women rarely climb the highest step on the career ladder. This is illustrated by Jennifer O’Connor Duffy’s analysis of the experiences of graduates of Radcliffe College, one of the premier female colleges in the USA. Institutional and social barriers to the advancement of women persist even though women are earning more tertiary degrees than men. For many reasons, including high drop-out rates among boys, it is projected that women graduates will far outnumber men in most OECD countries in a few years’ time. But due to discriminatory practices in the labour market, women will continue to be paid less than men and not reach the higher ranks of business.

According to Ann Goodman, women are banding together in the USA to address problems of gender discrimination and the implications for sustainability. Women employees and managers are demanding better business citizenship. The Women’s Network for a Sustainable Future (WNSF), founded in 2002, is trying to make companies live up to their corporate responsibilities. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), UN Global Compact, and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises should not be empty social and environmental pronouncements or ‘green washing’ by firms. The WNSF is now working with businesswomen in China to open up opportunities for female entrepreneurs and promote sustainability abroad.

But in China, the legal system is failing to protect the rights of women with detrimental impacts as shown in a study of the Chinese domestic service industry by Wang Zhuqing. Women account for 96% of domestic service workers – providing assistance such as cleaning and healthcare to other households – but lack contracts and insurance due to insufficient laws and government oversight. The survey found that most

domestic service workers experienced low wages, long working hours, lack of training, and limited vacation days. It is not a coincidence that the sector is primarily female. Such gender disparities in China's labour market will continue to detract from progress towards sustainable development.

If given adequate resources, women can make a huge difference to sustainability. In a study of South African farm workers, Stefanie Lemke, Nicole Heumann and Anne C. Bellows present evidence that female-headed households are better able to provide for the food needs of their families, even though they have fewer resources than their male counterparts. They highlight the important role of increasing women's access to finance and changing power relations in households to assure sustainable livelihoods for African families. This study affirms that focusing on women in development assistance efforts can achieve more rapid and pro-poor economic growth than focusing on men.

The crucial role of women in addressing disasters is underlined by Sunitha Kuppuswamy and S. Rajarathinam in their study of Tamil Nadu in the southern part of India. Not only do women tend to be more severely affected by natural disasters, they are also key to managing the aftermath. Following the 2004 tsunami, a network of women's self-help groups provided for the practical needs of the local population including water and sanitation, credit, healthcare and education. They relied on information technology to reach isolated areas. Increasingly, women and information and communications technology (ICT) are a powerful combination for sustainable development, both in enhancing the economic, environmental and social well-being of local communities and in helping the women themselves to realise their skills and potential.

The economic, environmental and social pillars of sustainable development in the North and the South come together in the case study by Olga Lucia Cuellar of Sustainable Harvest Importers. The international marketing of female-produced coffee from Colombia shows the economic advantage which gender can have in sustainable consumer markets as well as the environmental and social contributions which women can make to agriculture-based communities. Not only did the women coffee growers increase profits but they also enhanced individual and communal living standards and ecological sustainability. Enlightened consumers in international markets may hold the key to removing gender inequities in agriculture and other sectors.

This volume underlines that sustainable development is a gender issue and is unachievable without the full contributions of women. Gender discrimination is holding back communities and countries from achieving sustainable living standards. More gender-based statistics and analysis and especially gender-enlightened policies are crucial. Only the impartial presentation of the facts will persuade the captains of government and business – mostly men – that gender equity is in their own interest.

References

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