

# POLICY BRIEF

No. 15, 2018

## Gender Mainstreaming in the 2030 Agenda: A Focus on Education and Responsible Consumption & Production

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### Highlights

Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that affects all dimensions of sustainable development; women must be at the centre of the 2030 Agenda. Despite the interlinkages between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the commitment to “leave no one behind,” progress on gender mainstreaming is uneven across the SDGs. This brief looks at two selected areas: education (SDG 4) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). Progress has been made on gender mainstreaming in both areas, but there are significant gaps and a holistic approach is lacking.

#### Recommendations:

- Increase multi-stakeholder collaboration for ensuring women’s access to education and fair work arrangements across production chains.
- Provide women with educational opportunities in alignment with their own development aspirations.
- Develop gender-sensitive interventions that are context-specific to address power structures.
- Use gender assessment tools and promote public awareness for gender mainstreaming.

### Gender as a Cross-Cutting Issue

Increasing debate on the sustainable development agenda in recent years has revealed the extent to which gender inequality has been and is depriving women of their fundamental rights and opportunities — and also inhibiting global progress on sustainability. Women face pressing issues such as a lack of access to energy sources, clean water, safe sanitation, appropriate work arrangements, education, and health supplies, among others (Dankelman 2010; Franco 2014, 2017a). Given the challenges to gender equality that persist, it will take 50 years to achieve parity in political representation, and 80 years to achieve economic equality (IPU and UN Women 2017). Improving women’s education has been found to lower fertility rates and improve household nutrition. According to the Gender Gap Report (WEF 2017), in 144 countries there remains an average gap of 32% across four index dimensions: (i) economic participation and opportunity, (ii) educational attainment, (iii) health and survival, and (iv) political empowerment.

Acknowledging the severity of gender inequality and its impact on women’s lives around the globe, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is dedicated to gender equality — goal 5. This is reinforced by the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind”, and the agreement of Member States that the goals are

integrated and indivisible. Attaining SDG 5 will require the mainstreaming of gender equality in efforts to achieve the other SDGs, supported by legal frameworks to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination (ECOSOC 2017). Pursuing such synergies is essential, as gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that affects all dimensions of sustainable development (ESCAP 2017). Placing women at the center of the 2030 Agenda requires stronger interlinkages between the SDGs and a real commitment to investing wisely in women's capacities to cope with pervasive sustainability challenges.

Both education and responsible consumption and production are key areas for understanding better how to advance gender equality through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Whilst we have seen remarkable advances in gender parity in education, the overall progress towards achieving SDG 5 has been less impressive (Manion 2007; UN Women 2018). Evidently efforts have been made to connect goals 4 and 5, resulting in more equitable and quality learning, creation of lifelong opportunities, and women's empowerment for economic growth (UN Women 2018). There is also evidence to suggest a link between goals 5 and 12 — for example, when women have secure land rights, production is more sustainable and efficient (USAID 2016). But few attempts have been made to connect these two areas in practice (OECD 2008).

Focusing on these differing yet intersecting challenges, this policy brief identifies priorities for mainstreaming gender in both education and responsible consumption and production, with a view to advancing efforts towards achieving SDG 5. It provides policymakers with recommendations for effective gender mainstreaming, both within these selected areas and across all SDGs.

### Quality Education and Gender Equality — Linking Goals 4 and 5

Providing women with a quality education from the early stages of their development is essential to realising gender equality. If current trends in education continue, an estimated 15 million girls between the ages of six and ten will never set foot in a classroom, compared to a figure of 10 million for boys (UNESCO-UIS 2016). In 2013, the male workforce participation rate stood at 72.2% while the ratio for women was 47.1% (ILO 2014). In practice, the women who benefit the most from educational opportunities, both formal and informal, are those with the capital to afford them. The scarcity of economic resources for enabling access to education, particularly in developing countries, is threatening women's ability to pursue vocational training and therefore find gainful employment (Franco and Kunkel 2017).

Interlinkages between goals 4 and 5 aim for equitable and quality lifelong learning opportunities and to empower women while fostering economic growth (UN Women 2018). However, gainful employment opportunities and economic empowerment through education are still constrained by biased curriculums as well as economic, religious, and social norms, especially in developing countries. Household decision-making often does not favor female education and careers because of financial constraints, religious ideologies, and cultural beliefs held by parents, and the obligation to engage in family care. In fact, 75% of care work is undertaken by women, limiting their opportunities to engage in education at all levels (UN Women 2018). Thus, culture and policies should be taken into account in efforts to achieve quality education, developing synergies between stakeholders to increase effectiveness. Entrepreneurship programmes and pathways to access higher education are high-impact, and they help women to become economically self-sufficient and reinforce their desire for a high level of economic independence (Franco 2014). Very often these initiatives are driven by NGOs and civil society organisations, yet stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration between regional and local governments and the private sector is needed to effectively target women's educational needs in alignment with their development aspirations. This can result in positive outcomes for women themselves and the achievement of SDG 5 as a whole.

### Responsible Consumption & Production and Gender Equality — Linking Goals 5 and 12

Gender inequality is a determining factor influencing consumption and production practices worldwide, with evidence showing a correlation between the lack of progress on gender equality and the failure to achieve progress on sustainable development (OECD 2008; Stevens 2010; Sexsmith 2012). In developing nations particularly, production is structured towards profit maximization, targeting the employment of women in low-skill, lower-wage, and labor-intensive jobs (OECD 2008; UNEP 2016). In addition, global production demands have resulted in unfair work arrangements and exploitation of women across production supply chains in various industries (Mukhopadhaya & Lahiri-Dutt 2014; UNEP 2016), a situation that further exacerbates the issue. On consumption, there is a consensus that, in patriarchal societies, women's limited access to household resources translates into fewer livelihood opportunities and services (Franco 2017a; UNEP 2016). Moreover, women are solely responsible for the "socially reproductive work", that is, ensuring that household members meet minimum consumption needs. "Socially reproductive work" is simultaneously performed

with other productive activities. Yet gender-based inequalities have been marginalized in policy development and implementation for SDG 12, and the specific gendered contexts of productive, consumptive, and reproductive work ignored (Chant 2006; Sexsmith 2012; UN Women 2018).

Tackling the underlying social norms that limit women's access to social and economic resources will be crucial to mainstreaming gender in responsible consumption and production. For example, women play critical roles in food production in the developing world but are less likely to own or control land. In most Asian countries, women comprise 42% of agricultural labor with just 11% ownership of land. Lack of access to land adversely affects women's access to agricultural technologies and financial capital, thus impacting their livelihood diversification. When women have secure land rights, the land is used more efficiently, and sustainable production increases, ensuring the food security of the family as well as society as a whole (USAID 2016). Furthermore, women have an essential role to play in reducing food loss and waste, since women interact with food at each stage of the value chain, as the agriculture and food processing sectors rely heavily on a female labour force. Targeting women in food loss and food waste reduction campaigns could result in more significant reductions.

Assumptions and misconceptions related to gender dynamics and the role of women have impacted the outcomes of policies and programmes focused on sustainable consumption and production. In the household sector, the traditional role of women as "principal shopper" is misconceived as women having greater agency and autonomy in decision-making. Even though women usually propose more comprehensive approaches to those advocated by men, they still lack a voice in strategic issues, and the opportunities to participate and influence policy are still limited (OECD 2008; UNEP 2016). The views of men are often said to be representing the interests of all. However their views, in some cases, neglect the contribution of women in providing reproductive work for the family (Johnsson-Latham and Swedish Ministry of Sustainable Development 2006). Moreover, Autio (2009) argues that messages that reflect a careless attitude towards consumption are commonly available to boys and men, coupled with the implicit understanding that women have mainly a caring and nurturing role. This leads to the assumption that women are mainly responsible for upholding sustainability, thus exempting men from equal responsibility. These prevailing gender knowledge gaps result in the proposal of gender-neutral solutions that undermine gender equality, as well as efficient resource management. As such, to expose the gendered nature of

consumption and production processes, sensitization and capacity building initiatives at an individual, organizational, and broader societal level need to be emphasized (Sexsmith 2012).

## Policy Recommendations

Drawing from these two selected areas, the following recommendations are provided for policymakers and other relevant stakeholders to further explore connections between SDG 5 and all of the other sixteen goals.

### 1. Increase Women's Access to Economic and Social Resources:

- Facilitate fair and active representation of women in power structures and decision-making processes to ensure equal access, through financial support, legislative amendments, and a conducive social environment. For example, invest wisely in women's collective action to address barriers to their meaningful participation in education and employment opportunities.
- Develop context-specific interventions that consider gender roles and power relationships so that stakeholders foster ownership and systemic, transformative agendas. Concerning access to resources, engaging local leaders and communities can help to identify culturally appropriate mechanisms for women to achieve land ownership. Similarly, community engagement can increase access to education and employment opportunities.

### 2. Strengthen Gender-responsive Instruments:

- Build capacity amongst stakeholders and foster partnerships for gender mainstreaming, including gender-sensitive analysis of statistics, budgeting, procurement, and monitoring, to aid in the clarification of gender impacts and trade-offs between policy options.
- Build awareness about the need to address the gender gap, inclusive education, and responsible production and consumption methods. For instance, create social networks through mobile and internet technology to identify the types of gender discrimination faced by individuals and strengthen legal frameworks.

## Note

This policy brief is based on research supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science under its Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI) programme (projects JP17777 and JP17779).

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Gender Mainstreaming in the 2030 Agenda: A Focus on Education and Responsible Production & Consumption  
UNU-IAS Policy Brief — No. 15, 2018

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ISSN: 2409-3017

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## Publisher

United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)  
Tokyo, Japan

