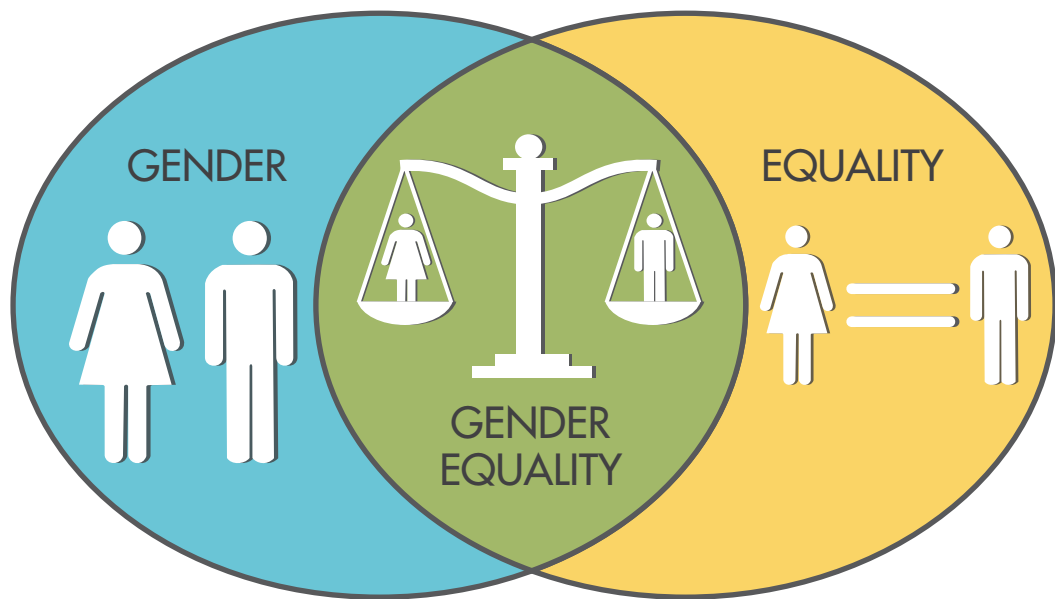


GENDER EQUALITY: A CORNERSTONE FOR A GREEN ECONOMY

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AUGUST
2017

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ABSTRACT

With most countries failing to move onto a sustainable development path and fulfil many of the outcomes emerging from the 1992 Earth Summit, a green economy is envisioned as a new pathway to achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication. It is a remedy for the prevailing brown economy, which has been a major driver of environmental degradation and inequality. A green economy would serve as a vehicle for accelerating and achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication, taking into account the vital links between the economy, society, and the environment. Central to its desired outcomes is gender equality, which is recognised globally as a fundamental requirement for achieving sustainable development. A successful transition to a green economy would therefore depend on how gender is assimilated into the transition processes, and on interventions to ensure gender inequalities are not perpetuated. This paper explores the potential for achieving gender equality in a green economy.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Rio+20	UN Conference on Sustainable Development
SDG	sustainable development goal
UNEP	UN Environment Programme

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a green economy first materialised in 1989. It was referenced in the title of a report, *Blueprint for a Green Economy*,¹ commissioned to advise the UK government on a consensus regarding the definition of sustainable development, and its implications for measuring economic growth and appraising projects and policies. Besides the report title, however, there is no further mention of the concept in the report itself. In response to a series of global crises – including threats posed by climate change, loss of biodiversity, and increasing inequality – the concept of a green economy resurfaced with the launching of the Green Economy Initiative by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2008. The initiative aimed to provide policy support for investing in green sectors, and for greening² environmentally harmful sectors. The concept was further promoted at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20) as a preferred alternative growth model. Promising to deliver low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive development, the move towards a green economy was endorsed by the international community of governments, inter-governmental organisations, businesses and scholars alike.

Globally, a green economy is contextualised in relation to sustainable development and poverty eradication – taking into account the vital links between the economy, society, and the environment. With most countries failing to move onto a sustainable development path and fulfil many of the goals emerging from the 1992 Earth Summit, a green economy is envisioned as a new pathway to sustainable development and poverty eradication. It is viewed as a remedy for the prevailing brown economy, which has been a major driver of environmental degradation and inequality. It is important to note that it is not intended to supplant sustainable development, but rather a green economy would serve as a means for accelerating and achieving such development.³

Given that a green economy is still an emerging concept, the international community has yet to reach a political consensus on its definition. Currently the most widely accepted and authoritative definition is one coined by UNEP, which defines a green economy as one that ‘results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing

1 Pearce DW, Markandya A & E Barbier, *Blueprint for a Green Economy*. London: Earthscan, 1989.

2 Greening is a process of becoming active about protecting the environment (see Cambridge English dictionary). The act of greening involves activities – economic or social – that are environmentally friendly. For example, activities that result in energy efficiency, reduced pollution, conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, alleviation of heat islands, reduction of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and responsible manufacturing techniques.

3 UNGA (UN General Assembly), *Objective and Themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*, Report of the Secretary-General, 2011, A/CONF.216/PC/7, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.216/PC/7&Lang=E, accessed 20 May 2017.

environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive.’⁴

Drawing from this definition and the characteristics of a green economy – namely, resource efficiency, low carbon economic activity, social inclusion and protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services – a green economy promises to yield more desired economic, social, and environmental outcomes, with social equity and environmental justice at the heart of sustainable development.

Central to achieving the desired outcomes of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication is gender equality. Equality as an aspect of sustainable development requires the present generation to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the same or improved conditions – inter-generational equity. It also means ensuring that everyone in the present generation can at least fulfil their basic needs – intra-generational equity. Gender equality is a vital element in achieving both inter-generational and intra-generational equity.⁵ Without addressing the gender relations which result in prevailing inequity, neither intra- nor inter-generational equity can be achieved.

Gender equality is acknowledged as a fundamental requirement for achieving sustainable development.⁶ This is reflected in a number of international norms and agreements. For example, the [Rio Declaration](#),⁷ an outcome of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, became the first UN conference to make important provisions for the recognition of women’s contributions and their full participation in sustainable development – as articulated in Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (also known as

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- 4 UNEP (UN Environment Programme), *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, A Synthesis for Policy Makers*, 2011, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/126GER_synthesis_en.pdf, p. 1, accessed 21 August 2017.
- 5 Biesecker A, Von der Maßlosigkeit zur Fürsorglichkeit, *Thesen für ein zukunftsfähiges Wirtschaften aus feministischer Perspektive*, in *FrauenRat*, 60, 5, 2011, pp. 8–11.
- 6 UN DESA (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>; Buckingham-Hatfield S, ‘Gender equality: A prerequisite for sustainable development’, *Geography*, 87, 3, 2002, pp. 227–33; OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in the Post-2015 Agenda: A Foundation for Sustainable Development*, 2015, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/POST-2015%20Gender.pdf>, accessed 24 May 2017; Tandon N, *Empowerment of Women in a Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*. New York: UN Women, 2012, <http://networkedintelligence.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Tandon-Green-Economy.pdf>, accessed 26 May 2017.
- 7 UNCED (UN Conference on Environment and Development), *The 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), 12 August 1992, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>, accessed 26 May 2017.

Agenda 21).⁸ Chapter 24 of Agenda 21⁹ – *Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development* – commits to strengthening the position of women. It contains over one hundred references and recommendations pertaining to women. The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*,¹⁰ adopted by UN member states in 1995, calls on governments to integrate gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development. It emphasises that the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men, boys and girls are a matter of human rights, a condition for social justice and the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Other norms and agreements adopted at international level include the 2012 outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development *Transforming our World* and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and its sustainable development goals (SDGs). The centrality of gender equality is made explicit across all the SDGs, both as a stand-alone goal – SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – and as a cross-cutting theme, with more than 30 related targets.¹¹

Following the global norms and agreements, various gender equality frameworks have been adopted at national, regional and continental level. The African continent, for example, has adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa,¹² the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa,¹³ the AU Gender Policy,¹⁴ and Agenda 2063¹⁵ with its Ten-Year Implementation Plan. Agenda 2063 is Africa's most recent development blueprint. It places special emphasis on gender equality and the empowerment of African women to drive wide-ranging economic, environmental, socio-cultural, political, scientific and technological

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- 8 UNGA, *Report on Environment and Development*, Annex I, Principle 20: 'Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development', A/CONF151/26 (Vol. I).
 - 9 UN Sustainable Development, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992, Agenda 21, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2017.
 - 10 UN, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2017.
 - 11 Women's Coalition, *Post 2015 Women's Coalition Response to Transforming Our World Outcome*, 2015, http://feministallianceforrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Post2015-Womens-Coalition_Response-to-Transforming-Our-World-Outcome-rev.pdf, accessed 1 June 2017.
 - 12 AU, *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, 2003, http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/protocole_rights_women_africa_2003.pdf, accessed 11 July 2017.
 - 13 AU, *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa*, 2004, http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/declaration_gender_equality_2004.pdf, accessed 11 July 2017.
 - 14 AU, *Gender Policy*, 2009, http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/gender_policy_2009.pdf, accessed 21 August 2017.
 - 15 AU, *Agenda 2063*, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063-framework.pdf>, accessed 11 July 2017.

As countries transition to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, far-reaching changes will have to be made to ensure equal opportunities for women, men, boys and girls – enabling them to truly participate equally in all spheres of development

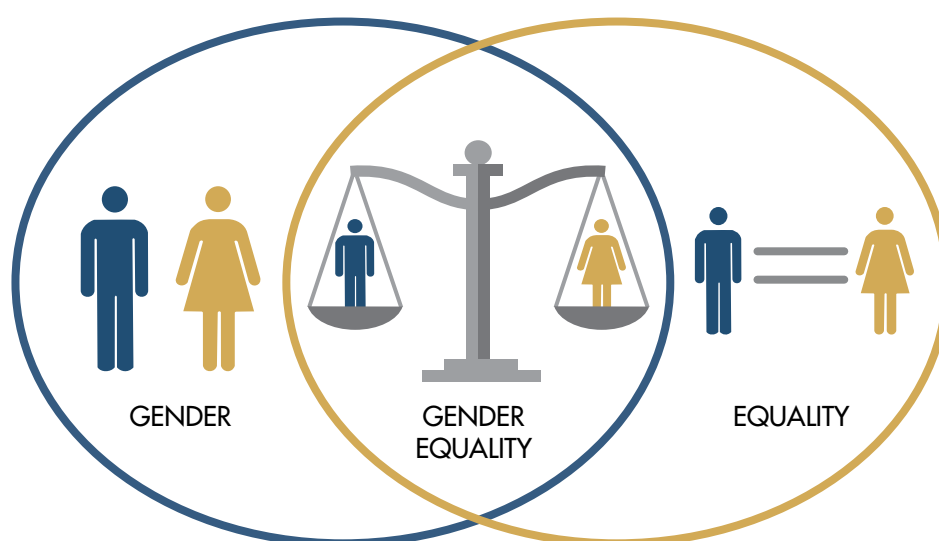
goals. To accelerate the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment commitments on the continent, African leaders launched the African Women's Decade – 2010 to 2020 – and the Fund for African Women.

As countries transition to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, far-reaching changes will have to be made to ensure equal opportunities for women, men, boys and girls – enabling them to truly participate equally in all spheres of development. Gender equality should be seen as a cornerstone for sustainability in a green economy if the desired outcomes are to be realised. The new pathway for sustainable development holds greater opportunities in which principles of gender equality can be modelled to ensure an equitable green economy that is low-carbon, resilient and sustainable.

CONCEPTUALISING GENDER EQUALITY

Understanding gender and equality (Figure 1) is central to understanding the significance of gender equality within the context of a green economy.

FIGURE 1 GENDER EQUALITY CONCEPTUALISED



Source: Author

GENDER

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, and the unequal power relationships that result. The attributes, opportunities

and relationships are socially constructed and learned through socialisation processes.¹⁶ From a very young age, boys and girls are encouraged to take on different roles. Girls are typically taught to do housework, while boys are expected to be active outside the home. As adults, women often assume responsibility for looking after the home, while men are seen as the breadwinners. These attributes are not biologically predetermined, but rather learned. They create expectations of men and women. Men are typically expected to be 'natural' leaders, decision makers and providers; while women are expected to be caregivers and supporters.

The attributes and opportunities are context-specific and change over time,¹⁷ meaning that gender is dynamic. Gender attributes and opportunities vary within and between cultures and are mediated by systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, as well as age. Gender is also known to intersect with many other layers of identity, inequality, privilege and dislocation (including race, culture, class and geographical location).¹⁸

The concept of gender is used to refer to both women and men, girls and boys. The common misconception that gender relates only to women or girls could be attributed to most literature focusing on women and girls. Furthermore, international declarations, policy and frameworks for gender equality tend to place greater emphasis on uplifting and empowering women and girls, than men and boys, notably because the former group is usually more disadvantaged and marginalised, as will be explored later in the paper. The call for gender equality stems from acknowledging the disadvantaged position that women and girls find themselves in, due to existing inequalities.

EQUALITY

The [Charter of the UN](#) recognises equality as the full and equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms for all, without distinction such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. It is about ensuring that all individuals have an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives. It recognises that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.¹⁹ It also

16 Commission on the Status of Women, *Gender Perspectives on Climate Change*, Issues paper for interactive expert panel on emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men, 2008, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/issuespapers/Gender%20and%20climate%20change%20paper%20final.pdf>, accessed 10 June 2017; UNESCO, *UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework*, 2003, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001318/131854e.pdf>, accessed 10 June 2017; UN DESA, *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues. New York: UN, 2002.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

18 *Ibid.*

19 UN, Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, 1945, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>, accessed 9 June 2017.

relates to giving people and sections of society an equal voice and equal opportunities in political and social institutions, and more control over their lives.²⁰

The call for equality recognises that certain groups of people with particular characteristics – including race, sex, social class, social origin and religion – experience discrimination and exclusion, resulting in explicit and implicit barriers, which limit opportunities for certain social groups to participate in society and to flourish.

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality therefore refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys.²¹ In the context of a green economy, it means they should have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and for contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, environmental, cultural and political development. Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender in the process of greening economies will impair or nullify the recognition, enjoyment or exercising of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is important to highlight that gender equality does not mean that women, men, girls and boys will become the same. It simply means that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. It is about their interests, needs and priorities being equally valued and considered, as well as recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IS CRITICAL IN A GREEN ECONOMY

There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between women and men – equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities – is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes.²²

Apart from being a fundamental human right, an end in itself, a legally binding obligation and a means for promoting sustainable development, literature presents additional

20 Sen A, *Development as Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

22 UN, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, *Important Concepts Underlying Gender Mainstreaming*, 2001, p. 1, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf>, accessed 8 June 2017.

evidence to make a strong case for why gender equality is critical in greening economies.²³ Due to fundamental differences and inequalities between men and women, girls and boys, the advancement of gender equality is an important issue to consider in many contexts, including a green economy. The differences and inequalities often manifest themselves in different ways and as already noted are usually deeply rooted in cultural norms, religious, political and social rights as well as institutionalised rules. These result in gender-based disparities that often disadvantage especially women and girls.²⁴ Though the list is not exhaustive, there are significant gender differences in social and economic development; consumption patterns; aspirations; access and use of knowledge; approach to environmental issues; ecological footprints; use, access and control of environmental resources; and management of the environment.

Exploring the differences and inequalities between women and men, boys and girls, and the resulting disadvantages, is vital in appreciating why gender equality is critical in a green economy. This begins with considering broad patterns of gender inequality that threaten efforts to improve human wellbeing and social equity – undermining men and women’s equal rights, dignity and worth.²⁵ For example, within the economic sector the labour market does not provide equal opportunities for women and men.²⁶ Compared with men, women continue to experience discrimination linked to employment access, choice of work, working conditions, employment security, wage parity, and balancing the competing burdens of work and family responsibilities. Such discrimination is most evident in developing countries, and often exacerbated by gendered patterns in occupational segregation. The majority of women’s work is concentrated in a range of sectors that are vulnerable and insecure. Women often end up in jobs with low pay, low security and limited social mobility. Women are also heavily represented in the informal

Compared with men, women continue to experience discrimination linked to employment access, choice of work, working conditions, employment security, wage parity, and balancing the competing burdens of work and family responsibilities

- 23 Stevens C, *Are Women the Key to Sustainable Development? Sustainable Development Insights*, 2010, <https://www.bu.edu/pardee/files/2010/04/UNsdkp003fsingle.pdf>, accessed 8 June 2017; UNDP (UN Development Programme), *Human Development Report 2011: Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*, 2011, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2011>, accessed 8 June 2017; OECD, *Investing in Women and Girls – The Breakthrough Strategy for Achieving all the MDGs*, 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/55/45704694.pdf>, accessed 8 June 2017; UN Women, *A Transformative Stand-alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components*, 2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/~media/AC04A69BF6AE48C1A23DECAEED24A452.ashx>, accessed 4 June 2017; Smyth I & C Sweetman, ‘Introduction: Gender and resilience’, *Gender and Development*, 23, 3, 2015, pp. 405–14; Terry G, ‘No climate justice without gender justice: An overview of the issues’, *Gender and Development*, 17, 1, 2009, pp. 5–18.
- 24 UN Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, 2014, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2014/10/world-survey-2014>, accessed 8 June 2017; *Ibid.*, p. 6; Boserup E, *Women’s Role in Economic Development*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970.
- 25 UN DESA, 2002, *op. cit.*
- 26 ILO (International Labour Organization), *Working Towards Sustainable Development: Opportunities for Decent Work and Social Inclusion in a Green Economy*. Geneva: ILO, 2012a.

economy, where their exposure to risk of exploitation is usually greatest, with the least formal protection.²⁷

Within the political sphere, gender inequalities relating to power – for example, access to decision making and representation – have been widely observed. Women are under-represented in political processes throughout the world. Understanding gender differences within formal decision-making structures, including governments, community councils, and policy-making institutions, is therefore important. The low visibility of women's perspectives, their different priorities, needs and interests are often not apparent in the political sphere. Hence national, regional or sub-regional priorities are defined without meaningful input from women.²⁸

In the legal sphere, patterns of gender inequality manifest in the different legal status and entitlements of men and women. Although the law is a powerful tool for promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, their rights are denied by the very same laws that should protect them. For example, in several developing countries, rights to personal status, security, land, inheritance and employment opportunities are often denied to women by law or practice.²⁹

Changes in the environmental sector affect everyone, but they affect men, women, girls and boys differently. As a result of longstanding inequalities that prevent them from being heard and their needs addressed, it is women and girls who are disproportionately affected by negative environmental changes. For example, exposure and response to climate change impacts are gender differentiated.³⁰ Existing inequalities in access to resources, gendered roles and power relations, shape and determine men and women's ability to cope and adapt to climate change; and their ability to meaningfully contribute to and influence solutions. This is particularly true in developing countries, where climate-related impacts affect the key sectors of agriculture, water, energy, biodiversity and ecosystems, on which poor men and women directly depend for their livelihoods.

Women and girls are often responsible for the most basic survival needs of their families, such as farming and food preparation, and collecting water and firewood. As such, they

27 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women*, 2012b, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_195447.pdf, accessed 6 June 2017; ILO & ADB (Asian Development Bank), *Women and Labour Markets in Asia: Rebalancing for Gender Equality*, 2011, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28620/women-labor-markets.pdf>, accessed 21 August 2017.

28 *Ibid.*

29 UN DESA, 2002, *op. cit.*

30 IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), *The Gender Advantage: Women on the Front Line of Climate Change*, 2014, <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/7f07674b-4843-476b-b327-f16d4df389e4>, accessed 6 June 2017; WB (World Bank), *Gender and Climate Change: 3 Things You Should Know*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011; Commission on the Status of Women, *op. cit.*; Doss C *et al.*, *The Gender Asset and Wealth Gaps: Evidence From Ecuador, Ghana, and Karnataka*. Bangalore: Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, 2011.

face a heavier burden of domestic work when these resources dwindle as a result of climate-related impacts.³¹ Girls are expected to take up additional domestic chores and support household income generation.³² They face a higher risk of dropping out of school in response to increased workloads. This limits their education, resulting in negative long-term life consequences.³³

Several gendered consequences and vulnerabilities associated with water scarcity are also known to affect women and girls in developing countries, especially in rural communities.³⁴ The gender division of labour assigns girls and women the responsibility of water collection for household use. Given this responsibility, girls and women in most rural societies tend to bear the brunt of water scarcity. The increased burden and time spent on collecting water further undermines educational opportunities for girls in terms of attendance rates, completion rates as well as quality of education. Other consequences and vulnerabilities linked to water scarcity include reduced social and intellectual development, negative health implications and increased vulnerability to sexual harassment or abuse.³⁵

The process of greening economies is critical and will have significant benefits for economic efficiency, social equity and environmental sustainability. Women and girls make up a little over half the world's population, with untapped talent and knowledge that could significantly improve economic development³⁶ and better environmental and resource

31 *Ibid.*

32 Reinvang R, *Children and Climate Change*. Norway: Save the Children, 2013; Swarup A *et al.*, *Weathering the Storm: Adolescent Girls and Climate Change*. Woking: Plan International, 2011.

33 *Ibid.*

34 North A, 'Drought, drop out and early marriage: Feeling the effects of climate change in East Africa', in Agostino A, 'Gender equality, Climate Change and Education for Sustainability'. *Newsletter for Beyond Access: Gender, Education and Development*, 24, Institute of Education and Oxfam, 2010.

35 UNICEF, *The Challenges of Climate Change: Children on the Front Line*, Innocenti Insights, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, 2014; UNICEF, *Exploring the Impact of Climate Change on Children in South Africa*. Pretoria: UNICEF South Africa, 2011; Wenden AL, 'Climate change affects the girl child', in: *Action for Girls: Girls' Rights are Human Rights*, Newsletter of the NGO Committee on UNICEF WWG (Working Group on Girls) and INFG (International Network for Girls), 2010.

36 The World Economic Forum, *Five Challenges, One Solution: Women*, 2013, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GAC_WomensEmpowerment_FiveChallengesOneSolution_Compendium_2013.pdf, accessed 6 June 2017; The World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report*, 2013, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2013.pdf, accessed 4 June 2017; Elborgh-Woytek K *et al.*, *Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains From Gender Equity*, IMF (International Monetary Fund), 2013, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2013/sdn1310.pdf>, accessed 4 June 2017.

A nation's competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on how it utilises its women and men equally, allowing both parties to access the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities

management.³⁷ Despite the challenges women and girls face, they have the ability to act as powerful agents of change. They are equipped with unique knowledge, capabilities and effective networks to drive real solutions for development and environmental challenges in a green economy. Their full participation in sustainable development spheres would result in more complete and creative solutions for targeted actions, greater innovation, enhanced distribution of resources, enhanced empowerment and reduction of poverty, more social stability, effective investment, enhanced cost-recovery and reduced environmental damage.³⁸

The World Economic Forum highlights that a nation's competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on how it utilises its women and men equally,³⁹ allowing both parties to access the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Most countries still fail to consider the female population, and underinvest in the human capital needed to assure sustainability. The potential for women to contribute meaningfully to the greening of economies remains largely untapped. If properly supported, the recognition and expansion of women's capabilities would constitute an important strategy for achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability in a green economy.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN A GREEN ECONOMY?

Governments should act to close the gender gaps that threaten the envisioned goal and promise of a green economy. In the absence of gender responsive policies and other initiatives, the green economy will only serve to exacerbate existing gender inequities, defeating the overall purpose of sustainable development. Gender equality strategies and instruments, such as gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and gender budgeting, are key to ensuring the promises of a sustainable green economy become a reality. This section discusses gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment as a

37 Agarwal B, 'The gender and environment debate: Lessons from India', *Feminist Studies*, 18, 1, 1992, pp. 119–58; Agarwal B, 'Environmental action, gender equity and women's participation', *Development and Change*, 28, 1, 1997, pp. 1–44; Cela B, Dankelman I & J Stern (eds), *Powerful Synergies: Gender Equality, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability*. New York: UNDP, 2012.

38 OECD, *Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximising the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women*. Paris: OECD, 2008; IJISD (International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development), 'Special issue on gender and sustainable development', 4, 2/3, 2009; Agarwal B, 'Gender Inequality, Cooperation and Environmental Sustainability', SFI Working Paper. Santa Fe: Santa Fe Institute, 2002; Agarwal B, *Gender Challenges*. India: Oxford University Press, 2016; Agarwal B, *Gender and Green Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Doss C, *op. cit.*; Babugura A, *Gender and Climate Change: South Africa Case Study*. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation Southern Africa, 2010, https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/download_de/ecology/south_africa.pdf, accessed 21 August 2017.

39 World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, 2014, Geneva Switzerland http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf, accessed 21 August 2017.

means for advancing gender equality in a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for promoting and achieving gender equality. It is defined as:⁴⁰

A process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

The gender mainstreaming process was endorsed as a major global strategy for achieving the goals of gender equality at the Fourth World Conference on Women, convened in Beijing in 1995. It requires that gender equality becomes the centre of analyses and policy decisions, programme budgets, and institutional structures and processes.⁴¹ Important to note is that gender mainstreaming is not about simply adding a 'women's component' or a 'gender equality component' into existing initiatives. It does not entail developing separate women's initiatives, or even women's components within existing activities. It requires that attention be given to gender perspectives as an integral part of all activities across all initiatives.⁴² The process entails that the perceptions, experiences, knowledge, interests, needs and priorities of male and females are given equal weight in planning, decision making and implementation. These same principles should apply to greening of economies. Gender equality should be considered at all levels throughout the transitioning process – including ensuring equal and meaningful participation of women and men in planning and policy development.

Gender mainstreaming has no set formula, as the process depends on context. A gender analysis is, however, critical to identify relevant gender dimensions and outline the opportunities that exist to narrow gender gaps in any context.⁴³ This is an essential first step for ensuring that initiatives meet gender equality requirements, with the overall aim of redressing gender inequalities and inequities. It examines differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women, and applies this understanding to policy development and service delivery. It explores the underlying causes of gender inequalities and discrimination. It is through this process that one gains an understanding of the different patterns of participation, involvement, behaviour and activities that women and men in their diversity have in economic, social,

40 UN DESA, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

environmental and legal structures, and the implications of these differences.⁴⁴ This understanding helps to set relevant and targeted objectives, plan concrete actions for resolving the inequalities, determine which activities will contribute to eliminating the identified inequalities, and develop clear indicators to conduct monitoring and evaluation.

Within the context of a green economy, gender analysis would ensure that gender equality is brought into the mainstream of greening existing jobs, the creation of new green jobs, accessibility and skills training for green jobs and other green activities. This enables more effective and targeted green initiatives and is vital for ensuring existing gender gaps do not persist. Failure to apply the gender mainstreaming approach in the processes of greening economies will result in gender-blind green policies and actions. Gender-blindness refers to the failure to recognise that gender is an essential determinant of social, cultural, economic and political outcomes. A gender-blind approach assumes gender is not an influencing factor in policy actions, therefore maintaining the status quo and failing to transform the unequal structure of gender relations.⁴⁵

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment is another vital strategy for advancing gender equality. It differs from gender mainstreaming in that it specifically targets women and girls with emphasis on addressing years of discrimination against them. There is considerable diversity in the emphases, agendas, and terminology used to discuss the concept. Women's empowerment emerged in the mid-1980s, as a way of challenging patriarchy.⁴⁶ In the 1990s the concept was broadened to be understood as an individual process of self-transformation. Figure 2 highlights three fundamental elements forming the vision for women's empowerment at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995.

Social economist Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.'⁴⁷ Figure 3 outlines three dimensions seen as pathways through which empowerment occurs.

44 Office for Women, *Gender Analysis Toolkit*, 2009, <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/communityservices/women/resources/gender-analysis/gender-analysis-toolkit.pdf>, accessed 7 June 2017.

45 UN Statistics Division, *Gender Statistical Manual*, 2015, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/statmanual/Glossary.ashx>, accessed 9 June 2017.

46 Malhotra A, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*, 2003, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/486312-1095970750368/529763-1095970803335/malhotra2.pdf>, accessed 7 June 2017; Arnoff E, *A Literature Review on the Conceptualization of Women's Empowerment*, 2011, <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:aaa16cd4-e931-4ad6-9c83-0532040e53ec>, accessed 9 June 2017.

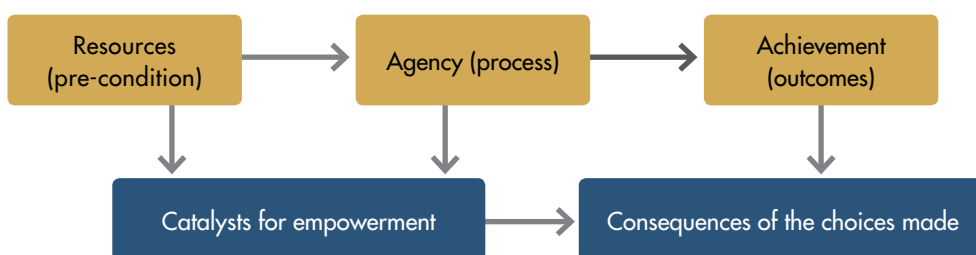
47 Kabeer N, 'Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', in *Sida Studies, Discussing Women's Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, 3. Stockholm: Novum Grafiska, 2001, pp. 17–54.

FIGURE 2 WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AS ENVISIONED AT THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN BEIJING, 1995



Source: Author

FIGURE 3 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT



Source: Kaber N, ‘Reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment’, in *Sida Studies, Discussing Women’s Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, 3. Stockholm: Novum Grafiska, 2001, pp. 17–54

The empowerment process occurs over time, increasing women’s agency in formulating choices and controlling resources. Resources that increase the ability to exercise choice and are a means through which agency is carried out, are attained by way of social institutions and relationships in society. Hence when social institutions and relationships promote male authority and endorse gender inequality, women become limited, relative to men in their ability to access resources.⁴⁸

48 *Ibid.*

The empowerment of women should facilitate articulation of their needs and priorities, encourage more active engagement in promoting these priorities and needs, improve their knowledge on fundamental rights, and strengthen their capacity to engage in societal life. Women's empowerment cannot be achieved in a vacuum. Men should be included in the process of change, as empowerment is not a zero-sum game where gains for women automatically imply losses for men. Women's empowerment does not refer to 'power over', or controlling forms of power. It is about alternative forms of power – 'power to', 'power with' and 'power from within' – which focus on utilising individual and collective strengths to work towards common goals without coercion or domination.⁴⁹

For a sustainable green economy, the involvement of women as agents of change is critical. Women should be engaged as significant actors in all greening processes, enabling them to have control, power, protection, voice and the ability to make decisions and influence important economic, social and environmental outcomes. Empowerment of women can be achieved through actions such as capacity building, specialised training, mentorship programmes, adult literacy, quality education, exposure, and any other innovative strategies that can enhance the confidence and competence of women in their nations and communities. For example, specialised training would include giving women special skills training and apprenticeships to work in green economies and recruiting them to fill 'non-traditional' jobs in agriculture, industry and services.

Empowered women need to be given the opportunity to exercise their rights. This requires strong support systems in a green economy. An enabling environment that allows women to engage in decision-making processes sustainably and effectively is vital. This will require the elimination of negative social, political and cultural forces that affect women's effective involvement in a green economy. It will require removing legal barriers that hinder the realisation of gender equality and developing supportive structures to facilitate an environment which recognises gender equality. It will also require increasing women's representation in decision-making bodies. In this respect, representation should go beyond numbers, as this is not a matter of merely counting 'how many women' there are, or filling quotas.

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY: THE VISION VERSUS THE REALITY

It has been 69 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promoting human rights and seeking to eliminate discrimination and inequitable outcomes for women, men, girls and boys. A series of declarations and commitments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment have since been ratified at national and international levels – in recognition of gender equality as a human right, a condition for social justice and a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. Despite these efforts, gender inequalities persist in every society, and advances in attaining gender equality remain sluggish. Women and men throughout the world remain unequal in legal, social, political and economic rights. Women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions,

49 Stevens C, *op. cit.*

resulting in fewer opportunities to influence economic, social and environmental decision making. Global poverty has retained a predominantly female face.

Although there has been great optimism that gender equality will form an integral part of the on-going transition towards a green economy, concerns have been raised in this regard as well.⁵⁰ These include how women will benefit from new employment opportunities – green jobs – given the existing inequalities and challenges that limit fair representation in the new and growing workforce. Green jobs form part of a strategic plan for transitioning to a green economy.⁵¹ A green job is defined as a decent job that contributes to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment.⁵² An estimated 15–60 million green jobs are expected to be created globally in various industries and sectors such as agriculture, forestry, eco-tourism, energy, water, construction, transport, and other resource-based sectors.⁵³ This would include activities such as forest protection and rehabilitation, organic farming and food processing, renewable energy development, water and sanitation infrastructure, green housing, environment and resource management, and environmental regulation. The concern is that women may continue to be under-represented in these sectors. It is thus essential that nations ensure a green economy does not maintain or even aggravate existing gender inequalities found in the traditional economy.

Women's access to green job opportunities may be limited due to inadequate training and experience. Services and key resources needed to position them effectively for green job opportunities are inadequate. Many of the green jobs are concentrated in parts of the economy historically dominated by men. In the sectors of energy and construction, for example, women have long been marginalised.⁵⁴ There is potential for women to benefit from the agricultural sector – including forestry, agro forestry, crop production, fisheries and livestock – which is also earmarked as an important sector within a green economy. This is owing to agriculture's potential to redress social, economic and environmental challenges faced by most developing nations. Given the over-representation of women in the agricultural labour force, transitioning the sector to a green sustainable sector is seen as an opportunity to transform existing gender inequalities into drivers for promoting new and better opportunities for women, especially in developing countries.

An estimated 15–60 million green jobs are expected to be created globally in various industries and sectors such as agriculture, forestry, eco-tourism, energy, water, construction, transport, and other resource-based sectors

50 *Ibid.*

51 ILO, *Sustainable Development, Decent work and Green Jobs, Report V*, International Labour Conference, 2013.

52 UNEP *et al.*, *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-carbon World*, 2008, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_158733.pdf, accessed 9 June 2017; UNEP, *Towards a Green Economy*, *op. cit.*

53 ILO, *Working Towards Sustainable Development: Opportunities for Decent Work and Social Inclusion in a Green Economy*, 2012, Geneva: ILO, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_181836.pdf, accessed 21 August 2017; ILO, *Transition to green economy could yield up to 60 million jobs, ILO says*, 2012, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_181795/lang--en/index.htm, accessed 21 August 2017.

54 ILO & ADB, *op. cit.*; Sustain Labour, *Green Jobs and related policy frameworks. An overview of the European Union*, 2013; Sustain Labour, *Draft Report: Green Jobs and Women Workers, Employment, Equity, Equality*, 2009.

However, despite the promise of green job creation in agriculture and forestry, concerns have emerged⁵⁵ that women in developing countries are unlikely to benefit as expected due to their ongoing marginal status. Generally, women are over-represented in informal, low-wage agricultural work with little opportunity for mobility and training.⁵⁶ A study in Malawi found that 63% of rural women are clustered in low-paid activities. Their rights are routinely violated, a pattern common in many developing economies.⁵⁷ Women workers are particularly sought after by the agricultural export industry, because they are less unionised. They have lower bargaining power over their wages and working conditions, and therefore often work in substandard conditions. The overwhelming majority of women employed as farm workers possess very low levels of education, are typically land-poor or landless, and lack alternative opportunities.⁵⁸ Given that waged employment is mostly in the informal sector in many developing countries, national labour legislation is unable to ensure the protection of women's rights and protect them from discrimination. This raises a major concern for how gender equality in the agricultural sector will be addressed through green and decent jobs in a green economy – critical for poverty reduction in rural economies.

Progress towards achieving gender equality is hindered mainly by poor enforcement of existing gender commitments and frameworks. This is a challenge across all countries. In some countries enforcement of gender commitments is non-existent. Translating gender equality commitments into action requires strong and sustained good governance systems, gender responsive policies and institutions, sufficient resources for implementation, adequate gender budgeting, and societal and political will. These requirements are often missing, and commitments to gender equality in many countries remain just words on paper.

Poor gender budgeting or lack of it has major implications for monitoring progress towards gender equality. Many countries lack a national gender profile and gender monitoring systems. Countries do not invest in national gender analysis activities to collect data required for monitoring and evaluating progress on gender equality. Inadequate gender-sensitive data, including data disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant characteristics, is therefore a hindrance to gender responsive monitoring and evaluation processes. The absence of required gender statistics can also be attributed to failure of prioritising gender equality. The lack of data on gender equality in turn weakens the ability of countries and any other stakeholders to develop evidence-based sustainable development policies, strategies, actions plans, programmes and projects. There is therefore a lot of work that remains to be done as countries transition to a green economy with the hope of advancing gender equality.

55 FAO (Food Agriculture Organization), *Gender Inequalities in Rural Employment in Malawi*, 2011, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap092e/ap092e00.pdf>, accessed 7 June 2017.

56 FAO *et al.*, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, Rome: FAO/IFAD and Geneva: ILO, 2010.

57 UNEP *et al.*, *op. cit.*

58 Dolan CS & K Sorby, 'Gender and Employment in High-value Agriculture Industries', Agriculture and Rural Development Working Paper, 7, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003.

CONCLUSION

Without the advancement of gender equality, realising the vision of a green economy is inconceivable. There can be no meaningful sustainable development. Effective action is required to ensure that gender inequalities of the traditional economy are not transferred to the new green economy. Gender equality should be viewed as a cornerstone for a successful transition to a green economy. Given that men and women have different specialised perspectives, experiences and knowledge that is beneficial to policy and decision making, they should be given the opportunity and support to equally participate in the greening of economies to achieve sustainable development. Instead of being marginalised, women should rather be seen as active agents of change, with different capacities to respond to environmental and developmental challenges. They are part of the solution and paramount to finding and building pathways that are more socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable.

Effectively addressing gender equality in the context of the green economy may have several positive development outcomes, including better management of natural resources and more inclusive community development. As an essential first step of mainstreaming gender into gender responsive green initiatives, systematic gender analysis should be encouraged at national level to inform policies, decisions, strategies and action plans.

Much work remains to be done to achieve gender equality. However, given that the foundation has already been laid in the form of commitments, treaties and frameworks, it is the duty of the state and its citizens to ensure that gender equality becomes a reality in a new green economy. With the renewed commitment to gender equality expressed in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, policymakers cannot ignore the gendered dimensions of development. Agenda 2030 should set a foundation for more comprehensive gender-responsive interventions in the green economy. This will require the social and political will to challenge discriminatory social norms and traditions that make it difficult to achieve gender equality in the greening of economies. It means a change in attitudes, behaviours and practices at government and community level. Such change can be difficult, and governments therefore need to establish a strong foundation to enable acceptance and responsibility for gender equality outcomes in greening economies. Capacity building and creating awareness on the importance and benefits of achieving gender equality is a good starting point to establishing a strong foundation for attitude and behavioural change. It is the responsibility of both men and women to work together as partners to promote gender equality. As states transition to a green economy, it is important that they seriously consider how gender equality will be advanced.

Instead of being marginalised, women should rather be seen as active agents of change, with different capacities to respond to environmental and developmental challenges

SAIIA'S FUNDING PROFILE

SAIIA raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. Our work is currently being funded by, among others, the Bradlow Foundation, the UK's Department for International Development, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the World Bank, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Open Society Foundations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Oxfam South Africa and the Centre for International Governance and Innovation. SAIIA's corporate membership is drawn from the South African private sector and international businesses with an interest in Africa. In addition, SAIIA has a substantial number of international diplomatic and mainly South African institutional members.



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