



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to  
achieve sustainable development for all**

### **Statement submitted by Training for Women Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### *Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all: A gendered dimension*

Across regions and countries, evidence suggests that sustainable development strategies that do not promote gender equality and the full participation and empowerment of women and girls will not succeed. As gender equality, in addition to being a human right, is also catalytic to social, economic and environmental progress, it should be well integrated into sustainable development policies, strategies and action plans.

Gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable development are intrinsically linked. These linkages cut across the social, economic, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development. Acknowledging how development challenges and responses affect women, as well as women's vital contributions to economic progress, is essential for the success of sustainable development and poverty eradication policies and practices. Initiatives that engage women as full stakeholders have proven to enhance sustainable livelihoods of local communities and national economies. The success of a sustainable development framework depends on translating existing policy promises on gender equality and women's empowerment into concrete actions. Entrenching women's rights within the outcomes, commitments and governing frameworks for sustainable development will enhance human rights frameworks.

Recent research efforts, most notably by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank, have improved our understanding of the factors that constrain women's economic participation as compared to men's. The disparity between the genders in productivity and earnings is persistent and pervasive: the value added per worker is between six per cent and 35 per cent lower in female-owned firms rather than in male-owned ones; female-managed farms are 20 per cent to 30 per cent less productive than male-managed farms; and in the workplace women earn as little as 20 per cent but never higher than 80 per cent of what men earn on average, depending on the country.

But this disparity is not because women are worse entrepreneurs, farmers or wage workers. It is primarily the result of differences in the size of businesses and farms, in the sectors where they operate, and in both educational levels and returns on this education. Women are more likely than men to work in sectors, industries and occupations with lower average labour productivity, such as in low-technology services or in low-mechanized farming. Women's limited access to productive resources and inputs stems from market and institutional failures, such as having less access to up-to-date information about markets and prices than men because of time or social constraints.

These productivity and earnings differences are transmitted across generations, creating a productivity trap. Women's economic disadvantage today is perpetuated in the form of lower investments in the girls and women of tomorrow.

Understanding the links between gender inequality, poverty and environmental degradation, and potential negative spiral effects, and taking responsive actions, can accelerate positive dynamics and promote sustainable development outcomes. Acknowledging the ways in which nature-society relations are gendered opens space for new approaches to poverty reduction, environmental conservation, and gender-equitable participation in sustainable development policies.

The focus on these connections as a means to inform development policies builds upon political ecology (PE) analysis, which aims to influence policy

development and investment programs by offering “chains of explanations” rather than single root causes. PE highlights the sociopolitical dimensions of natural resource access, control, and distribution.

A focus on gender and its relationship to poverty and environment reveals that familial and kin relations and familial property systems shape the gender division of labour, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, gendered environmental politics, and collective action and resilience. PE analysis also highlights the spatially and temporally contingent ways in which gender, poverty, and environment interact.

Population pressure on diminishing resources is an important factor in understanding land degradation — including soil erosion and deforestation — and food insecurity. However, study findings show that environmental degradation is accelerated when the national government and a few private individuals take increasing control of lands previously held communally. External control of resources also undermines, with regional variability, community cohesion and the traditional institutions that previously managed the rights to and responsibilities for communally held natural resources. The analysis highlights how social and economic marginalization, inequitable access to natural resources, and a lack of gender-equitable participation in environmental decision making in social institutions have a disproportionate and negative impact on women. To avoid such consequences, attention needs to be paid to the specific roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men in particular locales and at different levels.

Women are key economic actors and agents of sustainable development and consumption. As primary caretakers of families, communities and natural resources, women have accumulated specific knowledge and skills about local conditions and ecological resources. Furthermore, research has shown that women are more inclined than men to choose sustainability as a lifestyle, engage in environmentally appropriate behaviour and make sustainable consumption choices. It is critical to ensure that women participate equally and meaningfully in decision-making and control of sustainable development efforts. Particular attention needs to be paid to the active participation and leadership of indigenous women, migrant and refugee women and women from minority groups. Obstacles that impede women’s economic empowerment and participation should be addressed, including gender-based discrimination that impedes and undervalues women’s contributions to sustainable development. Enhancing gender equality requires targeted approaches to changing attitudes, behaviours and structures and discriminatory social norms and customary, common and statutory laws. Investing in women and girls will not only enhance gender equality, but will also promote cleaner and more equitable development and drive progress towards achieving sustainable development goals.

Equating sustainable development solely with green growth overlooks the social aspects of development and reduces striving for sustainability to a purely technological exercise. Focusing on achieving a sustainable and equitable economy will promote human wellbeing in the short and long term. This requires a paradigm shift so that economic thinking is driven by equity, is ecologically sound, socially just, participatory, transparent and accountable to present and future generations. Such a shift should promote a broad-based economy that protects and conserves the environment with fair and sustainable production systems and products. Poverty and excessive consumption stress the environment and communities. Processes leading to the new sustainable development agenda should pay particular attention to these aspects of unsustainable development and distribution.