

Gender-responsive policies and investments can improve the lot of women across the world

In analysing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, a study conducted by UN Women has found, unsurprisingly, that gender inequalities are pervasive in every dimension of sustainable development. The study titled 'Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' breaks down the gender aspect in every sustainable development goal (SDG) and finds that across the world, women fare worse than men in all indicators. For example, the poverty rate in south and central Asia is 15.8% for women, as compared to 14.5% for men; the global gender pay gap is 23%; and the labour force participation rate for prime working-age women since 1997 has actually fallen in southern Asia (by 14.7 percentage points in Kyrgyzstan, 10.3 percentage points in Bangladesh, and 8.1 percentage points in India).

Given that neither nutrition nor education is considered a priority for girls and women in many parts of the world, especially in south Asian countries, women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. In India, the caste dimension makes matters even worse. The report finds that an average upper caste woman is likely to live 14.6 years more than a Dalit woman. Poverty also affects women more than men. For every 100 men between the ages of 25 and 34 living in extreme poverty, there are 122 women. A larger problem is that gendered systems in society make it harder for women to climb out of poverty and cycles of deprivation and discrimination.

There is much that can be done in order to reduce these inequalities. As the report points out, one of the most important things is to ensure that data about gender is collected and made available more readily, especially in the developing world. Constant monitoring of progress is one of the most important ways of informing policy decisions that can make effective interventions in the lives of women and girls around the world. Governments must, at local and national levels, prioritise gender-responsive policies and investments. Encouraging adolescent girls to stay in school or providing pre-school and day care for children, for instance, can be effective ways of reducing the amount of time women and girls spend in unpaid domestic care work. One of the most important things the report highlights is that there cannot be sustainable development if it excludes half the population of the world.

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