

Editorial

# The Gender Dimension in Sustainability Policies and Their Evaluation

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## 1. Introduction

Overcoming the current challenges caused by climate change and the crisis of society's relationships with nature requires societal as well as economic transformation [1]. In order to avoid unintended consequences of policies aimed at transformation, it is necessary to take a comprehensive perspective that pursues several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) simultaneously. The report on the world in 2050 formulates as one of its key messages that transformations to achieve Sustainable Development Goals require a holistic perspective [2]: "The 2030 Agenda is holistic with deep and complex interactions across the SDG domains. [ . . . ] Focusing on individual or selected SDGs—be this during policy analysis or implementation—comes with the danger of adverse side effects related to other SDG domains or missing out on potential synergies and resulting multiple co-benefits".

A main driver for societal change in the recent past can be attributed to women—including their increasing participation in education and employment and their claim for an equal share of resources and equal appreciation of their contribution. The development of just solutions combating the socio-ecologic crisis also requires the inclusion and contribution of women. At the political level, this is reflected in the formulation of the SDGs as one of the 17 SDGs focuses on gender equality—mainly on equality between women and men. The other SDGs contain a gender dimension that must not be overlooked [3]. Furthermore, a broad consensus is reached in science and innovation policy that engaging in diverse social groups has a positive impact on policy-making as well as innovation [4].

Several linkages between SDGs are obvious as well as the related gender dimension: Quality Education (Goal 4), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and the prevention of poverty and hunger (Goals 1 and 2) are linked together as well as with gender equality (Goal 5) and reduced inequalities (Goal 10). However, we are still far away from the ideal world where gender equality is considered a standard in policy-making and the development and implementation of concrete measures, as well as their evaluation. Ignoring the dimension of gender may lead to policies or measures strengthening existing gender imbalances, missing their transformative potential, or to biased evaluations.

Following this, adequately considering the gender dimension becomes a fundamental requirement for transformative policies aiming at sustainable development. Hence, gender must be considered not only in regard to policy development and implementation, but also in regard to evaluation. This principle has been anchored in development evaluation for more than 20 years now and considering gender equality as a cross-cutting issue has become an evaluation standard [5–7]. In other evaluation fields besides development, evaluation of the situation is different. Even though feminist evaluation or equity-focused evaluation became accepted evaluation approaches, considering the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue is far from being a standard in Western countries, which has been shown by a recent report focusing on how cross-cutting issues are considered by national evaluation societies in Europe and in their standards [8–10].



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## 2. Articles

This Special Issue is aimed at providing a platform for researchers to share their innovative work about the gender dimension in sustainability policies and their evaluation. The papers included in the Special Issue address the interplay of development policies and sustainability in countries of the Global South. They present approaches of considering the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue in policies and they underline the relevance of standards defined by international organizations.

The paper “Towards Nondiscrimination and Gender Equality: The Role of International Labor Standards” by Zhanna Khamzina et al. focuses on the potential of international labor agreements as mechanisms for the transformation of national legislation towards sustainable development and gender equality. The analysis shows that international standards are considered by legal reforms but their implementation lacks. Authors recommend creating a state system for the promotion, analysis, and monitoring of issues of equal treatment and equal opportunities in access to work and employment. Furthermore, the analysis shows that international support is needed regarding the implementation of these standards as well as establishing the relevant infrastructure, like gender-sensitive monitoring of policy implementation in different fields.

The paper “Gender Inequality in Latin America: A Multidimensional Analysis Based on ECLAC Indicators” by Edith Medina-Hernández, María José Fernández-Gómez, and Inmaculada Barrera-Mellado uses gender indicators to describe the interplay of economic, physical, and decision-making autonomy in a comparative perspective in Latin America. Differences in the state of play regarding gender equality are interpreted as referring to the national socioeconomic and political environment. Based on the results of the analysis, policy recommendations are formulated. Hence, the study does not only provide a descriptive and correlational analysis, but it also underlines the relevance of gender equality indicators which allow for a cross-sectional analysis to support discourse about effective gender equality policies, identification of good practice policies as well as mutual learning.

While Khamzina et al. and Medina-Hernández et al. tackle issues of national policies and legal measures, the other two papers in this Special Issue address the level of development projects. Raphael Nawrotzki et al. from the German Institute for Developmental Evaluation pursue the question of whether or not donors prefer to implement concrete projects—specifically gender-focused projects—in safe places or if they dare to operate in conflict regions. The paper “Strategic Allocation of Development Projects in Post-Conflict Regions: A Gender Perspective for Colombia” shows that German-funded projects dare to operate in post-conflict regions and that women play an active role in the implementation of these projects. As women are especially affected by the consequences of conflicts, the results of the analysis highly support the claim for strengthening the gender focus in post-conflict recovery programs and actively involving women in their implementation. This would be in line with goals formulated by the UN in the context of Agenda 2030 as well as the SDGs.

Kutlwano Makwatse et al. discuss in their paper “Gender and Equity Considerations for Building Climate Resilience: Lessons from Rural and Periurban Botswana” gender dynamics around household-level climate adaptive policies and practices. The study aims at understanding the gendered variations of how people understand resilience to climate change in different regional settings. The analysis is based on a household survey as well as on qualitative data. The results illustrate gendered perceptions of climate change within households: while men address more the economic effects of climate impacts, such as reduced income from agriculture, women were more likely to be concerned with barriers to accessing water. This reflects the gendered division of labor within the households, but also points out realities that should be considered in policy design. The authors recommend addressing the gendered access to formal institutions through additional outreach activities, specifically addressing the different implications of the availability of water for men and women as well as the gendered decision-making process in future programs.

### 3. Future Research Perspectives

The articles of this Special Issue contribute to the still marginalized debate on gender and sustainability. They point to the interdependence of several Sustainable Development Goals by conceptualizing and developing criteria for the evaluation of the status quo of (non-)sustainable developments. In doing so they deliver valuable instruments to further the discourse and hopefully the implementation of gender-sensitive sustainability.

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