

Gender equality and sustainable development: Achieving the twin development goals in Africa

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1. Introduction

Africa's powerful economic performance has been accompanied by many development challenges that threaten to slow down the continent's path and pace towards structural transformation and sustainable development. Among those, the twin challenges of tackling widespread inequality particularly gender inequality and the un-sustainability inherent in the over exploitation/depletion of the continent's natural and mineral resources is a critical imperative. As the continent strives to achieve the structural transformation of its economy in order to achieve its agenda 2063, a greater understanding of the strong linkages between gender equality and sustainable development is a condition *sine qua non* for its socio-economic transformation. It will also inform an effective implementation of the African Common Position and priorities on the Post2015 as well as the domestication of the sustainable development goals that will be endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in its September 2015 session.

This brief is a contribution to the 2015 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) by shedding light on the powerful nexus between gender equality and sustainable development.

Key messages of the brief are:

- Sustainable development cannot be achieved or sustained in Africa (and in the world) if half of the population of

the continent is excluded from the development processes.

- Promoting women's effective participation in the management of Africa's resources will contribute to tackling the resource curse towards an equitable, transformative and sustainable development

2. The inter-linkages between gender equality and sustainable development in Africa

Several evidences suggest that the key drivers of gender inequality and unsustainability are closely intertwined. The recent World Survey on the Role of Women in Development depicts the dominant development paradigm underpinned by under-regulations and the pursuit of economic growth as the contributing factor to both gender inequality and unsustainability.¹

The neoclassical model is built on the assumption that natural and mineral resources are unlimited and women's time is elastic. Such an assumption is false and has led to social-economic, environmental un-sustainability, and persistent violations of women's human rights. Effects of this unsustainable development model often disproportionately affect women and girls because of their already precarious

¹UNWOMEN, 2014, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

situation due to structurally unequal power relations.

This analysis also applies to Africa. A review of the continent's growth pattern reveals that it is neither inclusive and equitable nor sustainable for at least two reasons. First, growth is generated from an over-exploitation of Africa's natural and mineral resources. Because the latter are not renewable, and because the main benefit goes out of African countries, such growth strategy will lead to a depletion of Africa's resources jeopardizing the rights, future and well-beings of the next generations.

Research by the International Union of Forest Research Organisations (IUFRO) found that Africa accounts for over half of global deforestation. In addition, two thirds of arable land on the continent may be lost by 2025². Further evidences show that the extractives industries produce adverse impacts on the population from the exploration stage of the mineral commodity which is often accompanied by displacements of the population due to the exploitation of the resources. Compensation packages are often given to men who generally are considered as the heads of households. Because of the asymmetric intra-households relationships women are not always involved in the allocation of resources which then might be used for none family priority needs. It is generally found that women's income tend to benefit more the children and the family,

²The International Union of Forest Research Organisations (IUFRO), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the Finish Forest Research Institute, August 2009, "Making Sub-Saharan African forests work for People and Nature. Policy approaches in a changing global environment"

whereas men generally prioritize their personal preferences, including alcohol.³

Average hours per week spent fetching wood and water in rural areas of selected Sub-Saharan African countries

	Guinea (2002-03)	Madagascar (2001)	Malawi (2004)	Sierra Leone (2003-04)
women	5.7	4.7	9.1	7.3
men	2.3	4.1	1.1	4.5
girls	4.1	5.1	4.3	7.7
boys	4.0	4.7	1.4	7.1

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2011

In addition to the depletion of the continent's resources, environment degradation is a critical issue. Oil, diamond and gas drilling is accompanied by serious pollution related to the toxic products of materials used. Radioactive substances emanating from uranium mining have devastating effects on the environment and the health of the population. Massive use of water by mining companies has contributed to shortages of fresh water for the local communities. The water pressure is worse in the rural areas. It is estimated that while over 90 per cent of the richest quintile in African urban areas use improved water source and over 60 per cent have piped water on the premises. However piped-in water is not available in the poorest 40 per cent of household in the rural areas and less than half of the population use any form of improved source of water with important health

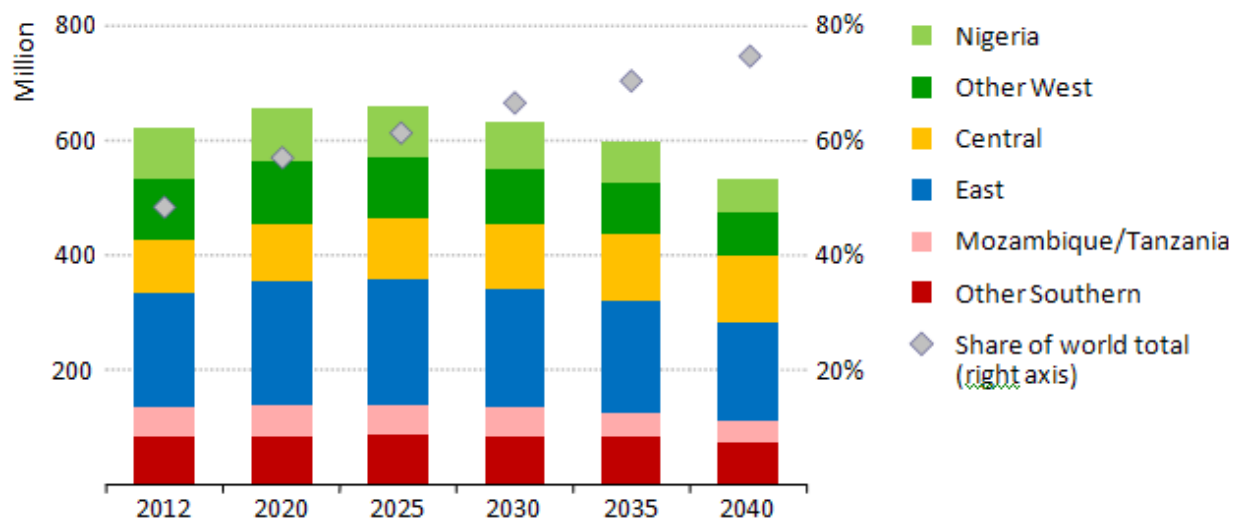
³Women Watch, 2012, Facts And Figures. Rural Women and the MDGs

impacts⁴. With only 61 per cent of water coverage Sub-Sahara Africa is off track from reaching the 75 per cent target set for the region⁵.

Environment degradation exacerbates poverty particularly in the rural areas as the poor rely on the ecological system for their livelihoods (food, energy and medicine). Because women and bear the brunt of food, water and energy provision to their families, water shortages and

than 620 million people in Sub-Sahara Africa live without electricity and nearly 730 million people rely on dangerous, inefficient source of energy such as biomass affecting their health and the environment through greenhouse emissions.⁷

The figure below shows the proportion of electricity access in Africa



deforestation mean that women and girls have to walk longer distances to fetch water and collect firewood. Studies have found that women in Sub-Saharan Africa spend about 40 billion hours a year collecting water.⁶ In countries like Guinea and Malawi, women spend respectively over three and eight times more than men fetching water.

African households' limited access to electrify further exacerbates women's burden of unpaid care work and environmental degradation. The Africa Energy Outlook, 2014 found that more

Source: The African Energy Outlook, Special Report in the World Energy Outlook, 2014

The second illustration of the un-sustainability of Africa's growth pattern is its limited impact on the well-beings of the population because of the unequal redistribution of the continent's wealth. Women and girls, the youth and the poor receive a thin share of the continent's growth. Gender inequality in the labor market persists confining women primary in low paid, insecure jobs and limited career paths. Empirical research by the ECA reports a very low progress in women's share of non-agricultural paid employment in Africa

⁴United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), International Decade for Action "Water for Life" 2005-2015

⁵UNDESA, opt

⁷The African Energy Outlook, Special Report in the World Energy Outlook, 2014

estimated at 35, 3 per cent in 1990 against 39, 6 per cent in 2011 representing as little as 4, 3 percentage points increase in two decades⁸. Women's wage is estimated between less than 60% and 75% of men's in many African countries market. In addition, many jobs, especially the managerial and technical positions especially in the industrial sector such as mining, are highly male-dominated, thus reflecting the low economic power of African women given that they do not benefit from the high wages related to those positions.⁹

3. Transforming gender relations for a sustainable and equitable development in Africa: A Call for action

Gender relations and the power relationships inherent in them are socially constructed. They are therefore far from being static, and they can and should be changed, to transform Africa's social, economic and environmental landscape. In fact, gender relationships are consistently being negotiated in the context of changing political, economic, social and cultural environment at the local, national and international levels¹⁰.

Beyond recognizing women's crucial role in achieving sustainable development in Africa, (as reflected in various normative documents) greater actions to protect women's rights and

to unleash their potentials are pressing. Their rights to participate in and benefit from the economic, social and environmental policy making processes; to manage natural resources, and to participate in the allocation of public resources should be respected.

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⁸ECA, Africa Regional Beijing+20 Report, November 2014; MDG Report on Africa, 2014; African Gender and Development Index Regional Report 2013

⁹Diop, Ngone, 2014, Policy brief "Beijing +20 – Taking stock of the journey to define new transformative pathways for change"

¹⁰Sen, Gita (1999), "Gender Mainstreaming in Finance. A reference manual for Government and other Stakeholders", London , Commonwealth Secretariat