



# Gender and the Environment

**ISSUE** Women constitute half of the world's population and half of the world's resource managers, and therefore are essential to every aspect required for safeguarding the global environment.

Women's roles give them significant influence over direct and indirect pressures on environmental systems and resources. Women depend on and are direct users and stewards of natural resources, and in areas such as energy and food systems, women farm and produce most of the world's food supply. Yet, they own less than 20% of the world's land, lack equal rights to own land in more than 90 countries, and commonly face more barriers than men to access markets, capital, training, and technologies, and remain unrepresented in decision-making spheres at all levels. Women's needs, roles, and leadership have historically been unrecognized and undervalued, and persistent social and economic inequalities between men and women hold back today's prospects for sustainable development and sound environmental management.

Governments around the world have made legally binding commitments to promote gender equality and fulfill women's human rights. Building on these commitments, the 2030 Agenda, including its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognize the interlinkages between gender equality and the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and call for integrated solutions. Similarly, the Conferences of the Parties to the Multilateral Environmental Agreements call for specific actions to improve women's participation and promote gender equality. They recognize that

gender norms influence the impact of people on the environment, and the impact of environmental degradation on people, and that efforts to more effectively engage women will make environmental policies, programs, and institutions more efficient and sustainable.

## SOLUTION

While women face unique barriers, they are also increasingly recognized as agents of change who make valuable contributions to the environment. Tackling the world's most tenacious environmental challenges requires mobilizing an array of talented, skilled, and committed individuals who can engage in natural resource management, either in their individual capacity or through community organizations, civil society, the private sector, or national and international governance structures. Governments and international organizations alike recognize that promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to environmental sustainability—from decreasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and protecting soils to saving forest and preserving biodiversity.

The potential transformation of gender equality stems not only from the opportunity to engage more people in environmental efforts in terms of absolute numbers, but also through the inclusion of the unique

skills, knowledge, and experiences of women in their roles as the primary users and stewards of many natural resources. Addressing gender gaps and more effectively engaging women has the transformative potential to generate greater results for the global environment. This will help include the unique skills, knowledge, and experiences of women and will support women's roles that can change the causal chain of environmental degradation, including their involvement in public and private sector governance, their role in productive sectors, their choices as consumers in the global market, and the investment choices they make.

It is incumbent upon anyone designing and implementing environmental policies, programs, and projects to address the barriers that limit the opportunities of women to make decisions that could improve resource productivity, enhance ecosystem management, and create more sustainable energy, water, and food systems. To come up with meaningful solutions to environmental challenges, governments, national organizations, and international institutions, including the GEF, need to use gender-responsive approaches that ensure that the voices of both women and men are heard as participants and leaders in environmental policies and projects related to conservation - from improving resource productivity and enhancing ecosystem management to creating more sustainable energy, water, and food systems.

Furthermore, the integrated agenda of the SDGs recognize the importance of women's empowerment not just for achieving SDG 5 on gender equality, but also for achieving the goals linked to poverty, food security, agriculture, water, sustainable energy, climate change, ecosystems, forests, and cities.

## LOOKING AHEAD

To be effective, efforts to stem environmental degradation must tackle its drivers and contribute to systems change in key areas, such as the production and consumption of food, energy, and goods and services, and the growth and management of cities. It must include efforts to address interconnected drivers for unsustainability, exclusion, and inequality, and involve actions on many fronts, such as promoting

an equal voice in planning and decision-making among key actors, and creating opportunities for both women and men to develop, support, and benefit from sustainable solutions to environmental and social challenges. Concerted collaborative efforts will be needed to narrow gender gaps in areas such as control over natural resources, participation and decision-making, and access to benefits and services. This will not only contribute to greater gender equality, but also help unleash women's potential as key agents of change to achieve global environmental benefits.

It is necessary to translate policy improvements into concrete action such as implementation, monitoring and financing gender-responsive approaches—and holding stakeholders involved accountable for achieving results.

A big necessity is to address the data gap. Gender responsive approaches need to be built by evidence, by collecting, analyzing, and using gender data and statistics—and sharing what works with policy makers to inform and design more effective responses. Explicitly recognizing that efforts to promote sustainable development, combat environmental degradation and efforts to address gender inequality are mutually supportive, governments and international organizations are adopting more integrated approaches.

The GEF's new Policy on Gender Equality, adopted in 2017, places the GEF approach to gender squarely on par with this new thinking and practices. It marks GEF's increased ambition to collaborate with governments, the private sector, and civil society to catalyze projects and actions that have the potential to materialize greater environmental impact through gender-responsive approaches and results.

Collaborative commitments on sustainability and integrated approaches holds renewed promise to harness opportunities to connect global environmental benefits and gender equality, including:

- a. Supporting women's improved access, use, and control of resources, including land, water, forest, and fisheries;
- b. Enhancing women's participation and role in natural resources decision-making processes, with women as agents of change at all levels;



- c. Targeting women as specific beneficiaries and creating opportunities from sustainable livelihoods and income-generation opportunities such as conservation, rehabilitation, and restoration actions for women;
- d. Investing in women's skills and capacity by supporting capacity development of different groups, including communities and women's organizations.

It is only together that we can achieve the transformation needed to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. As the GEF moves forward with new and innovative financing, we are committed to challenging our approach and to work together with our partners at the local, national, and global levels to leverage strategic entry points to promote gender equality to help achieve global environmental benefits and catalyze system change.

