



Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment

Comprehensive and holistic approach to
achieving gender equality

Cross-cutting recommendations include improving gender-disaggregated data collection to inform decision-making, integrating monitoring and evaluation into policy development for transparency and accountability, allocating sufficient resources to implement gender equality policies and programmes, ensuring intersectional policy and programme design, and prioritising safety and security for girls and women in all aspects of life.

Thematic recommendations focus on specific areas:

- ◆ Prioritising mental health is crucial, and investing in accessible mental health services for women and girls can yield significant benefits. Inclusive, comprehensive national mental health policies should be developed, and mental health education should be integrated into schools and workplaces.
- ◆ Expanding access to education, particularly for rural and marginalised women and girls, is required. Barriers to education, such as safety concerns, inadequate sanitation facilities, and lack of digital infrastructure and access to it, must be addressed. Establishing gender-responsive learning centres, ensuring access for marginalised groups, improving existing sanitation infrastructure, and expanding internet connectivity and access to it are key goals.
- ◆ Engaging men and boys is vital for achieving gender equality. Harmful social norms contribute to issues like violence against women, and gender sensitisation and transformative education should be provided to all stakeholders.
- ◆ Disaster preparedness and management should include women and girls as they are disproportionately negatively affected. Mandating their representation in decision-making bodies, conducting gender and vulnerability assessments, providing gender-responsive training, and collaborating with local organisations are essential.
- ◆ Promoting women's economic empowerment is critical. Enhancing financial inclusion and promoting economic opportunities for women through stronger collaboration among financial institutions, government, private sector and civil society organisations can have a significant impact on women's economic empowerment and economic growth.

Gender inequality is internationally recognised as a cross-cutting issue that must be addressed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the realisation of basic human rights. Considering that all G20 countries have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality and empowering all women and girls are intrinsic objectives. However, a pernicious and persistent gap remains: Women comprise 49.7% of the world's population¹, yet the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report (2023) estimates it will take another 131 years to attain a gender-equal society at the current pace². Women hold only 33% of leadership positions across public and private sectors³, earn less than men, are over-represented in low-paying jobs, are less likely to own land and control assets than men, and have limited influence over important decisions⁴. Women are also exponentially more vulnerable to discrimination, violence, sex and labour trafficking, the effects of climate change and disasters, food insecurity, and lack of access to education and healthcare, among other disproportionately negative impacts⁵. When women are empowered with education and decision-making power, together with access to and ownership

and control over economic resources, they contribute more to sustainable development; children are less likely to suffer from malnutrition and more likely to be educated. Women's empowerment has long-term positive impacts on a family's economic status, significantly reducing poverty, and women are more likely to promote environmentally sustainable practices in agriculture and consumption⁶. Gender equality is vital to achieving a regenerative, harmonious, and prosperous world, and empowering women is a critical component of achieving gender equality.

Achieving gender equality cannot be accomplished through isolated or fragmented approaches. Instead, a comprehensive, holistic, systemic approach must be adopted to achieve sustainable and long-lasting results⁷. The following policy recommendations aim to advance such an approach, highlighting the inter-connected nature of these policies.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

The following five key components reflect gaps in cross-cutting issues that have weakened previous policy designs and their implementation. Therefore, these must be incorporated into all policies and programmes to successfully realise the SDGs.

1. Improve, increase, and incentivise high-quality gender-disaggregated data collection. This requires dedicated, inter-sectoral resources to design data collection protocols that reflect holistic indicators on gender, society, economics, environment, health, education, and safety; design appropriate tools that will facilitate data collection; and teams of social and data scientists to extract meaningful insights from the collected data.
2. Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to gender equality policies and programmes. Mandate the integration of gender budgeting into existing public financial management and in future reforms. Gender budgeting must be included throughout the entire budget cycle, applicable to planning, budget execution, reporting, impact evaluation, and reflection upon efficacy. Incorporating gender budgeting and the allocation of

Further, data collection should include regular, periodic audits of the implementation processes of policies and programmes. Incentives should be put in place to ensure high-quality processes and data collection.



adequate human resources into all phases of the budget cycle will improve sustainability of gender policies and programmes and improve gender-related outcomes.

3. Ensure monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessments are integrated into developing all policies and programmes. This entails the creation of context-appropriate key performance indicators and expected outcomes, which should be publicly available. Additionally, evaluation reports should be published to provide a comprehensive overview of the progress made. By adopting this approach, organisations can enhance accountability, facilitate evidence-based decision-making, and foster transparency.
4. Incorporate safety and security into all aspects of life, with special attention paid to institutional approaches to ensuring girls' and women's safety. One of the primary characteristics of gender-based violence (GBV) is that it cuts across all boundaries - social, economic, and political - therefore requiring urgent attention in developing and developed nations alike⁸. Schools, workplaces, and public spaces need to be designed (or re-designed) with safety and security as a priority.

First responders, criminal justice workers, social servants, and the medical community should be actively engaged. The most effective initiatives to reduce violence against women and girls require a community-based, multi-pronged approach and sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders. These initiatives should address underlying risk factors, such as gender roles and the acceptability of violence⁹.

5. Develop intersectional policy and programme design. Develop policies and programmes that are targeted, tailored, flexible, and cognisant of the different identities women carry. These involve understanding the specific challenges faced by indigenous women, LGBTQ+ women, women of colour, women with disabilities, and others. Recognise these experiences and barriers to design more effective policies that are responsive to the unique needs of diverse groups of women. Stakeholder participation, including those from traditionally marginalised groups, should be increased at all levels of decision-making processes. Ensuring that policy development includes voices representative of all aspects of intersectionality will result in more equitable policies.

Thematic Recommendations

Prioritise Mental Health

In 2022, global costs of mental health disorders were estimated at 4.7 trillion USD and are expected to grow significantly annually¹⁰. However, countries' mental health spending remains low, with less than 2% of health budgets allocated on average, particularly in low-income countries¹¹. Despite one in ten individuals being in need of mental health care, government spending in low-income countries is estimated at less than 1 USD per capita. For example, investing in scaled-up treatment for depression and anxiety can yield a 4 USD return in better health and productivity for every 1 USD invested¹².

Specifically, women face a significantly higher lifetime risk of mood disorders and anxiety compared to men¹³. Investing in accessible mental health services for women and girls offers extensive economic and social benefits, including the potential to reduce the inter-generational transmission of mental illness. However, addressing men's mental health issues is also crucial for achieving gender equality¹⁴, as there is a strong link between men's mental health and gender-based violence¹⁵. Early intervention and prevention programmes for mental health, particularly in schools and community settings, can significantly



reduce mental health problems in adulthood¹⁶. Such programmes, incorporating robust social-emotional learning skills, have shown positive outcomes for mental health¹⁷, all of which are vital in the post-Covid-19 era when global health systems are still

strained, and mental health conditions are even more prevalent.

Revamp existing or develop comprehensive national mental health policies to:

1. Incorporate social-emotional learning and mandatory mental health education in schools and workplaces by 2025.
2. Increase access to mental health services for underrepresented communities by providing financial incentives to healthcare providers to serve these communities by 2025.
3. Increase funding for public-private partnerships to expand access to mental health services in underserved areas by 50% by 2030.
4. Ensure mental health is integrated into all primary care services by 2030, and that access to these services is subsidised or free of cost.
5. Increase the number of community-based mental health services available in underserved areas by 50% by 2030.



Expand Education and Continuing Education to Reach Rural and Marginalised Women

While most countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment, approximately 129 million girls are still not attending school, with 97 million of them being of secondary school age¹⁸. Such statistics highlight the need to address low completion rates and target underserved populations for sustainable gender parity in education. Investing in women's education has significant financial benefits, as each year of education can increase earnings by 10%, and educating all girls and women could boost global GDP by up to 112 billion USD annually¹⁹.

Barriers to girls' and women's education include safety, inadequate sanitation facilities, and lack of digital infrastructure and access to it. Providing proper sanitation facilities in schools increases girls' attendance rates by 11% and improves academic performance²⁰. Additionally, expanding internet access, especially for girls and women in rural areas of developing countries, has a substantial impact on reducing poverty and promoting gender equality²¹.

1. Establish and operate gender-responsive, accessible, and affordable learning centres in underserved areas by 2030. This includes migrant and immigrant populations and rural areas.
2. Ensure that at least 80% of uneducated girls in all their diversity, marginalised groups, and migrants have access to learning centres and online education by 2030.
3. Increase the percentage of girls in all their diversity, marginalised groups and migrants who complete secondary education or equivalent by at least 50% by 2030.
4. Improve sanitation and hygiene in all existing education infrastructure; provide all newly-built infrastructure with safe, functioning, hygienic facilities suitable for girls' and women's needs.
5. Aggressively implement a strategy to ensure last-mile connectivity for under-served populations. (e.g., The International Telecommunication Union's Last-mile Internet Connectivity Solutions Guide²², or alternative) to ensure technological literacy for girls and women. Achieve 80% connectivity with minimum speeds of 25 Mbps by 2030.



Engage Men & Boys

Engaging men and boys is critical to gender equality and a key component of a holistic approach. The negative effects of social norms on men often contribute to violence against women, harmful gender stereotypes, and many other negative outcomes²³. Studies to measure the effects of harmful social norms on men and boys have been developed, including an evaluation of a concept called the “Man Box”. This refers to harmful beliefs that pressure men to conform to certain stereotypes, including being tough, self-sufficient,

and sexually aggressive²⁴. Internalising these beliefs leads to a range of negative outcomes, including sexual violence, traffic accidents, bullying, violence, suicide, binge drinking, and depressive symptoms in men aged 18-30 in the US, costing the US economy at least 15.7 billion USD annually²⁵. The same issues cost the UK 3.8 billion USD and Mexico 1.4 billion USD²⁶. In addition to global mental health efforts, specific gender sensitisation efforts need to be implemented.

1. All educational institutions, workplaces, government offices, and non-government organisations must provide gender sensitisation and masculinities’ transformative education to their staff, children, parents, policy-makers, judiciary, and front-line workers by 2030.
2. Ensure that 80% of educational institutions, workplaces, government offices, and non-government organisations receive regular audits of their gender sensitisation and masculinities’ transformative education programs by 2030.
3. All curricula should include culturally and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights and responsibilities of all genders, awareness of alternative masculinities, sexual and gender diversity awareness, sexual harassment, anti-violence and anti-bias campaigns, and online safety by 2030.
4. At least 50% of all educational institutions, workplaces, government offices, and non-government organisations should have measurable targets for engaging men and boys in the context of gender equality by 2030.



Disaster Preparedness and Management

Women and girls, particularly those in lower socio-economic populations, are disproportionately negatively impacted by environmental degradation and disasters. Yet, women are typically not systematically included in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risk reduction and resilience efforts or in other environmental decision-making



roles. This has resulted in persistent inequalities in women's access to housing, education, health services, safety, employment, and other post-disaster economic reconstruction

1. Mandate a minimum representation of at least 50% women, girls, and other vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) planning and policy

efforts. Women's roles as key stakeholders in agriculture, biodiversity preservation, and as transmitters of inter-generational values and sustainable environmental practices are vital contributions to disaster preparedness. In particular, indigenous keepers of traditional knowledge have a long-held understanding of the plant and animal species that inhabit their regions and the sustainable practices that allow them to flourish. It is important to include indigenous and native peoples, especially women, in planning and decision-making processes to prevent or mitigate climate-induced natural disasters. Several agencies of the United Nations have developed programmes to address gender inequality in disaster preparedness and relief from multiple angles, but men still hold 94% of managerial roles in the field of disaster risk reduction. Upon closer look, women in managerial positions are concentrated in roles such as personnel and public relations rather than direct management of disaster response programs.

development committees, task forces, and decision-making bodies and ensure this target is met by 2030.

2. Conduct gender and vulnerability assessments in all disaster-prone areas within the next three years.
3. Implement specialised gender-responsive DRRM training for at least 500 policymakers, planners, and practitioners in G20 countries, annually.
4. Establish community-based training initiatives in 50% of disaster-prone

communities within the next three years, focusing on empowering women and girls as leaders in disaster management.

5. Collaborate with local organisations, NGOs, and community leaders to deliver awareness programmes and challenge gender norms in at least 90% of targeted communities.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Access to finance for women entrepreneurs has a significant impact on economic growth. Studies indicate that closing the gender finance gap in developing countries could unlock USD 5.5 trillion in global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025. Advancing women's access to finance equality could also add USD 12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. Additionally, women-led start-ups generate 78 cents in revenue for every dollar of funding, compared to 31 cents for start-ups founded by men. Furthermore, companies with more women in senior management positions have better financial performance, with a six percentage points higher net profit margin for companies with at least 30% women in leadership positions. Enhancing financial inclusion



and promoting other economic opportunities can be achieved by enabling convergence among financial

1. Mandate financial service providers to allocate a minimum of 33% of their credit portfolio specifically for micro, small, and medium scale enterprises led by women and marginalised groups.
2. Incentivise loan officers to positively consider applications from women business owners and institute an “if not/why not” accountability framework, under which loan officers must explain why a loan application submitted by a woman was rejected.

institutions, government, private sector, and CSOs.

Specifically:

3. Provide capacity building and skills development to women and marginalised groups to access employment, entrepreneurship and investment opportunities in frontier technologies and the green and blue economies.
4. Encourage gender-responsive public procurement programmes in G20 countries; mandate Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting by the top 1000 publicly listed companies, encouraging reporting on gender-responsive corporate procurement as a metric.

Conclusion

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment requires a comprehensive and holistic approach. Cross-cutting recommendations include improving gender-disaggregated data collection, integrating monitoring and evaluation into policy development, allocating sufficient resources, and prioritising safety and security for women and girls. Thematic recommendations focus on prioritising mental health,

expanding access to education, engaging men and boys, including women in disaster preparedness and management, and promoting women's economic empowerment. These recommendations, with adequate human and financial resources, when implemented, will contribute to creating a regenerative, harmonious, and prosperous world where gender equality is a reality.

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