

SDG 5 IN COMPLEX FRAGILE SETTINGS: PARTICIPATION, PEACE AND POLITICS

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INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years after the adoption of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), gender equality and women's empowerment have gained significant international commitment on the level of principles, but progress in practice is slow and fails to meet the stated targets. While Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 encompasses a more comprehensive list of targets than its predecessor, MDG 3, a set of critical obstacles stands to limit its success under the new 15-year time horizon.

Because women's political, social and economic participation is crucial to all of the SDGs, the degree to which gender is mainstreamed across the 2030 Agenda will be a determining success factor. The opposite is also true: In fragile contexts and post-conflict countries, the balancing act between strategic opportunities and obstacles is particularly delicate and challenging. In conservative environments, misinterpretations and passivity will most likely lead to conservative backlash. Broadly speaking, if SDG 5 is implemented in a context-specific way and the development process well-managed by both national and international stakeholders, relatively quick and comprehensive change is possible. This brief outlines challenges and opportunities associated with SDG 5 implementation and draws on recent research and reviews to identify policy recommendations.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Of the 20 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) that is gender-related, only 3 per cent is allocated to projects with a principal contribution to gender. The low level of resources appropriated to gender equality and women's empowerment suggests their de-prioritization relative to other development objectives.

When funded, gender equality and women's empowerment activities are rarely mainstreamed. Rather, they are often 'added on' at the end of the planning phase when the agenda and implementation framework have already been set. The consequences of this sequencing are threefold. Firstly, when women are prevented from meaningful participation, their diverse experiences, needs and perspectives are not fully incorporated into development policy and practice. Secondly, it puts focus on the symptoms rather than the root causes of gender inequality, as it leaves out the underlying analysis that exposes root causes and consequences. Lastly, it reduces gender equality to a 'women's issue', failing to recognize the essential role that men and boys play either in reinforcing or dismantling patriarchal power structures and violent masculinities.

Empirical evidence on the development impact of gender inequality is fragmented. This knowledge gap makes it difficult to design development interventions and assess their efficacy in different contexts. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive, verifiable gender equality data reduces the ability of advocates and implementing organizations to overcome prejudice and political opposition, and secure financing. Systematic evaluations of the development initiatives designed to address gender inequality, and of the level of gender-mainstreaming in development efforts in general, are needed in order to generate a body of validated and applicable best practices.

As such, SDG 5 must be strategically related to existing global policy frameworks, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 11 UN resolutions on Women, Peace and



Security (WPS) and the New Deal. The implementation of these policies needs to be aligned in order to maximize progress and impact.

Research and policy are important instruments and levers; however, the full and active participation of women in peace and development transcends empirical confirmation and policy affirmation. Gender equality is a universal right, not an academic hypothesis or a politically negotiable cause. The implementation of SDG 5 should be driven by this understanding and approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Elevate gender equality and women's empowerment on the global agenda through targeted exchanges, capacity building and increased financing.

- Broad political reform processes, often with macroeconomic objectives, have driven gender equality progress in many countries. Data on these experiences have significant political and practical value for fragile and post-conflict settings. Best practices need to be systematically shared and implemented on a political level and should be supported by technical assistance for SDG 5 implementation.
- Resources allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment should be proportionate to the scale of policy commitment(s). Civil society should act as a watchdog and raise awareness about under-resourced gender equality initiatives in order to hold officials accountable.

2. Investments in analysis and data collection related to gender equality and women's empowerment should be increased through global accountability, support mechanisms and conditional financing.

- International policymaking bodies should follow up with national governments at established intervals to assess progress towards adopted international agreements. This process should be reinforced with financial and technical support to develop measurement, evaluation and reporting capacity.
- Internationally and nationally co-owned instruments and processes for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting should be further developed on both general and context-specific levels.

3. Gender equality and women's empowerment activities should be better integrated among development actors and across global policy frameworks.

- Gender mainstreaming throughout the activities of development and security actors remains an essential strategy.
- Civil society organizations should be supported in establishing more operational networks and communities of practice that allow member organizations to leverage each other's knowledge, experience and resources in support of women leaders, and SDG 5 implementation.
- The UN should facilitate coordination between development stakeholders implementing SDG 5 (e.g. its own agencies and institutional recipients of UN support). Together with other intergovernmental bodies and financial institutions, it could initiate institutional collaborations on gender equality and promote coordination assessments as a critical incentive for support.
- Since existing inequalities are often multiplied during times of conflict, conflict resolution instruments (e.g. peace negotiations; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategies) should be used to correct structural inequalities and promote inclusion in order to promote sustainable peace and development.
- The ongoing UN peace operations reform efforts recognize the need to strengthen the gender equality dimension in terms of mandate and operations. Peace operations' overall political responsibility in fragile contexts demonstrates the need to fully exploit gender equality as a strategic tool.

