SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT G⊙ALS

5 GENDER EQUALITY

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

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Introduction

The roots of SDG5 go as far back as the United Nations Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975 and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). From the mid-1970s, women entered the development agenda thanks to the continuous efforts of liberal feminist economists who promoted and brought visibility to women's issues (Calkin, 2015). These efforts continued to be part of feminists' agenda in the 1980s and 1990s and women's rights remained on the international development agenda (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Many of these conversations and efforts to tackle women's social and cultural precarious circumstances were later captured and systematised in the 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which aimed to provide a list of clear targets and to enact the work laid out by feminists since the 1970s.

MDG3 in particular focused on "promot[ing] gender equality and empower[ing] women." The 2015 United Nations Report on the MDGs highlighted the targets met and the areas that needed further work, such as in achieving literacy levels, strengthening and facilitating women's access to health services, and ensuring employment access, among others. According to the report, steady improvements had been noted and many countries enacted women-focused instruments, but these were rather unevenly developed, and their visibility varied across countries. The report asserted that millions were being "left behind because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location" and that more targeted efforts were needed "to reach the most vulnerable" (David, Albert and Vizmanos, 2018, p. 8).

Adopted in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were designed to replace the MDGs as a set of universal objectives to tackle political, environmental, and economic problems facing the globe. A gendered lens was explicitly incorporated across some of the SDGs (including SDGs 1, 2 3 and 4), and SDG5 focused specifically on "achiev[ing] gender equality and empower[ing] all women and girls." Instead of the top-down approach of the MDGs, SDG5 aimed to engage more women's voices in the processes of addressing gender issues. New aspects such as women's unpaid work, their sexual and reproductive rights and gendered-based violence were brought to the forefront as well.

Towards SDG5: Engaging Theory and Practice

On the long road to SDG5, initial theoretical frameworks turned to women as a vulnerable group and aimed to develop strategies for empowering them within different social spheres. In practice, this approach translated into a focus on setting up gender mainstreaming structures (Alston, 2014) and

institutionalising gender within development organisations (Mukhopadhyay 2014; Bradshaw and Fordham, 2015). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) added the Gender Development Index as a means of measuring the gap between males and females in terms of human development indicators such as health, knowledge and living standards. However, critics have noted that these approaches and indicators have defined gender inequalities in terms of women's issues alone, without tackling wider power relations and a broader understanding of the concept of gender itself.

Moving away from a Women in Development (WID) framework to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach as early as the mid-1990s, policy makers and other public stakeholders began to investigate other key areas where gendered differences manifested. Initially, these differences were primarily discussed along a men vs. women binary (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 402). By widening the scope from a focus on "women" to one on "gender," strategies took into account not only women's access to work but also the more complex power relations between different gender categories (Calkin, 2015, p. 297). In this context, SDG5 was implemented as a response to the many criticisms of the MDGs and as a strategy to push gender-focused agendas forward. SDG5 drew attention to the relationships between gender and poverty eradication, food security, water, energy, health, education, employment and economic growth. A rights-based approach added an important lens to the investigation of gendered inequalities and power relations, although such a lens hasn't always fully interrogated the assumptions behind this approach (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015, p. 399).

While SDG5 has made significant contributions to the development agenda, from a theoretical standpoint, its targets remain to be critically analysed, deployed and expanded. Scholars worry that gender has been co-opted and instrumentalised in various institutions to the point that it no longer serves its initial political and interventionist goals (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Women and girls are nowadays seen as key instruments in anti-poverty policies and conversations about economic development. However, as Calkin (2015) notes, this is the result of a neoliberal lens that tends to depoliticise gender issues and potentially use a gendered lens for other purposes. Furthermore, while GAD objectives and strategies have been put in place at the policy level, the GAD agenda did not make the impact initially projected (Mukhopadhyay, 2014) and has remained primarily at the discourse level (Calkin, 2015), with much more practical work needed to be implemented. An added critique of the GAD agenda points out that policy makers have not fully addressed gender diversity and instead revert back to a focus on women's issues alone, thus reducing the two notions of "gender" and "women's challenges" into one category (Calkin, 2015). Moving forward, theoretical approaches need to encompass analyses of various forms of intersectionality, as well as "links between gender and economic justice" (Calkin, 2015). Such approaches will enable deeper understandings of gendered inequalities embedded in many social structures, policies, programmes and practices. As the following examples of implementation in Europe demonstrate, the achievements of SDG5 and the GAD agenda are entangled in progress and co-option, targets met and areas that still need significant revision and intervention.

Markers of Progress: European Examples

In the European Union, the implementation of several mechanisms, policies and projects have focused on the targets of SDG5, including gender equality, security and empowerment. Significant strategies have attempted to tackle women's representation in decision-making processes and the political arena, as well as their access to employment (with a focus on STEM fields of activity), work-life balance and family attributions, and gendered violence and harassment. The development of online tools complements these efforts, though they are yet to be fully evaluated for their social impact.

Towards gender-balanced decision-making processes in the political arena

Efforts in many European countries have been deployed to offer women training, mentoring and networking opportunities to enter politics (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018). Particular attention is given to ensure "the equal representation of men and women on electoral lists" (e.g., in Belgium) and to meet the gender quotas for national elections (e.g., in Slovenia) that are supported by legislation and policy. In Ireland, an online platform, Women for Election, provides training to female candidates and campaign leaders so they can be prepared for the political scene. Similar efforts in France led to the introduction of a system of binomial candidates for departmental elections which guarantees gender

parity and shared decision-making at the departmental level. However, data demonstrates that women remain grossly under-represented in decision-making positions both in employment and politics, and they still earn "16% less than men across the European Union" (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018). The figures demonstrate a need for continued work in the political arena to diversify the male-dominated groups in leadership positions.

Employment

With policies on gender equality in place, many European countries are currently developing tools for raising awareness about the gender pay gap and gender stereotypes. For instance, in 2017 Poland published an online application that allows private companies and representatives from the public administration to monitor pay gap indicators and make appropriate decisions (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018). In Estonia, "family-friendly employer" labels recognized the efforts of employers in ensuring a family-friendly environment and equal treatment. Under the 2018 Gender Equality Act, Bulgaria has worked on a set of procedures that identify and reward companies that implement the gender equality policy (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018). However, while progress is visible at the level of policy and top-down strategic actions, in practice female employment has increased slowly. Long-standing issues such as women occupying jobs in lower-paid sectors, being paid fewer hours and taking more career breaks remain persistent challenges.

Addressing the Family Domain

According to a 2018 report on equality in the EU, home and family are largely considered the female domain: "More than four in ten Europeans (44%) believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family. Moreover, in one third of EU Member States this percentage is even 70% or more" (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018, p. 12). Across Europe, efforts are underway to address the imbalance between family and work life. In Germany, the introduction of the Parental Allowance Plus and the Partnership Bonus set up a support scheme with financial incentives for both parents to stay in employment while splitting family duties more equally (DG for Justice and Consumers, 2018). In 2017, Malta introduced a free childcare scheme to support parents interested in pursuing their work and/or education. The promotion of parental leave schemes work to create a positive culture around fathers and their involvement in the rearing of children. In countries such as Sweden, Germany and Denmark, the number of fathers taking parental leave is on an upward trend—although they are yet to attain parity. The division of labour in the family continues to be at the forefront of national agendas.

Violence and Harassment

A significant target of SDG5, the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment remains an important focus of gender policy. At the legislative level, countries such as Latvia, Ireland and Spain have made substantial legislative changes to combat gender-based violence. These initiatives have been accompanied by several public campaigns to draw attention to issues such as domestic violence and human trafficking (including the exploitation of minors and women). A similar national strategy was developed in Croatia in 2017. The EU has aided with the training of judges and public prosecutors in cases of domestic violence. Human trafficking at the European level continues to be a major challenge.

Challenges Under SDG5

According to the UN, as of April 2017, gender inequality "persists worldwide, depriving women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities." On the basis of available data for 87 countries, from 2005 to 2016, 19% of women in the age range 15-49 years of age had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the 12 months prior to the survey, and in the most extreme cases such violence led to death. In 2012, compared to 6% of male victims, "almost half of all women who were victims of intentional homicide worldwide were killed by an intimate partner or family member" (UN, 2017, p. 26). Although child marriage is declining, the speed of that decline is far from satisfactory. In the year 2000, nearly 1 in 3 women aged between 20 and 24 reported that they were married before they were 18. By 2015, that figure had only declined to 1 in 4. Moreover, only "52% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 who are married or in union make their own decisions about consensual sexual relations and use of

contraceptives and health services" as per existing data from around 2012 for 45 countries, 43 of which are in developing regions. The practice of female genital mutilation/cutting remains high in some of the 30 countries with representative data, even though it has declined by 24% since around 2000 (UN, 2017).

Achieving gender parity and the empowerment of women and girls requires more vigorous efforts not only in the sphere of policy reformation to combat deeply rooted gender-based discrimination, but also in practice, where projects, programs and activities need to continue to challenge patriarchal attitudes and associated social norms. Ensuring access to education and mainstreaming gender have been important achievements under the SDG5; however, progress is also needed in the following areas:

- Translating access to Higher Education into opportunities for employment (Ahmed and Hyndman-Rizk, 2018);
- Moving beyond a male-dominated political sphere by encouraging representation and active participation of a wider range of individuals that represent different genders and communities;
- Working towards the elimination of gender-related violence against all vulnerable groups;
- Moving towards the recognition of gender diversity and addressing the needs and challenges of the LGBTQIA+ community;
- Increasing focus on intersectionality (Le Masson, 2016) as institutions cannot address singular challenges without looking at the interconnected relationships between gender, ability, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, race, environment, social structures of kinship, economy, etc. (Enarson, Fothergill and Peek, 2018); and
- Decolonizing gender-informed agendas by making them relevant and specific to their locales and in articulation with global contexts. Recognizing the theoretical and practical richness within the concept of gender, womanhood, manhood, etc. is fundamental for a deeper understanding of social relations in their specific contexts.
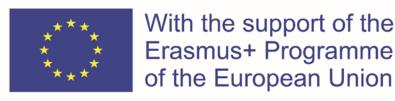
New Challenges

Besides achieving the main targets of SDG 5 as outlined in the 2030 Agenda, stakeholders should consider new areas of intervention where gender-sensitive responses need to be implemented with rigor and robustness. The challenges of the digital age should be brought to the forefront and explored in relation to gendered access to digital networks and practices, agency within digital environments, as well as the impact of non-access and/or limited access of various communities. According to Gender Equality and Big Data (2018) by UN Women, the move towards Big Data has not paid attention to the representation of data along gender lines. If we want to ensure that progress towards SDG targets continues, disaggregated data and data focused on particular vulnerable communities will be of great importance. Nevertheless, the deployment of Big Data tools and methodologies needs to be carefully balanced.

Historically, discussions of gender-based inequalities have integrated the environment as a critical component in finding practical solutions. In light of current conversations on the impact of climate change and natural disasters, policy makers and other public stakeholders must consider gender-sensitive approaches. Disasters are "gendered events" (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2015) with differentiated impact on vulnerable groups. For instance, women oftentimes are confronted with "a double disaster": the natural event itself, as well as its gendered effects, including increased post-event violence, lack of personal security, poverty (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2015), and lack of access to the management of resources such as water, information, means of production (Alston 2014). A few current projects have already integrated a gender dimension in their planning and delivery of activities to build resilience and respond appropriately to climate change and natural disasters or any other major disrupting events (Le Masson, 2016; SUEUAA). These examples will contribute to the formulation of new SDG targets that will better prepare communities to bring all resources and competences together. SDG5 has marked its socio-political moment; yet, with new challenges in sight, the work of identifying, addressing and delivering gender-informed projects will remain of great significance to the international development agenda.

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