Gender and the Environment

Building the Evidence Base and Advancing Policy Actions to Achieve the SDGs
Key messages

• Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are universal goals in their own right. However, gender disparities and biases persist in all areas, including the environment. Addressing these inequalities and inequities is a social, environmental and economic imperative.

• Women around the world are disproportionately affected by environmental factors: climate change, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, growing water scarcity, and inadequate sanitation and other infrastructure. This is especially the case in developing countries and rural communities, where women may have more limited access to natural resources, face barriers to decent work and finance, and are more likely to shoulder an over-proportionate share of unpaid work.

• Evidence shows that women and men experience differentiated effects from environmental damage, due to specific exposure to environmental and occupational risks, socio-economic factors and gender discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic is a dramatic reminder of how systemic gender inequalities can be exacerbated by global shocks and crises, and how closely environmental factors are linked to people’s well-being.

• The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cover gender equality (SDG 5) and environmental goals (the five Planet goals), but mostly consider these objectives separately. The complementarities and trade-offs between gender- and environment-related goals are not adequately addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

• Gender equality and environmental goals are mutually reinforcing and create a virtuous circle that will help accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. Acknowledging and addressing the gender environment nexus could provide for policy coherence, a greater focus on well-being, and help promote green and inclusive growth.

• To bring together the gender and environmental sustainability agendas, it is urgent to address the massive shortage of gender-disaggregated data.

• Women play important roles in environmental action but are underrepresented in decision making on environment-related matters. Equal representation of women in private and public leadership positions is key to driving more integrated environmental and economic agendas.

• Ensuring a “just transition” to low-carbon economies can increase productivity and lead to better economic outcomes and more resilient societies. Enhancing the participation of women in green innovation can be a source of high-skilled jobs for women and boost overall productivity.

• Environmental justice is key to addressing the gender-environment nexus. Women and youth, including those in indigenous societies, are often not fairly represented nor included in decision making processes and environmental policy making. A rights-based approach to environmental action is essential to meet the 2030 Agenda objectives.

• An integrated policy framework that brings together gender and sustainability goals, and considers trade-offs and complementarities at the local, national and international levels, is needed. The gender environment nexus should be included in all relevant global standards.
The Gender-Environment Nexus

Why

Women and men experience differentiated effects from environmental factors, due to their different physical characteristics and different roles and behaviours in societies. Whether looking at energy, water, transport, urban design, agriculture, or consumption patterns, a gendered lens is key to understanding these differences in environmental impacts. Globally, more women than men die prematurely due to indoor air pollution, exposure to unsafe water sources and sanitation, and lack of access to hygiene such as handwashing facilities (OECD, 2021). Addressing environment-related inequalities is a pressing need also for economic sustainability, as the welfare cost attributed to premature deaths from environmental and occupational factors is calculated to be 17% of global GDP in 2017 and 6.8% of total GDP in OECD countries (OECD, 2021).

Gender inequalities have increased as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to deteriorate economies and populations’ overall well-being. Environmental and climate-related impacts on human health – both physiological and mental – depend not only on differences in exposure to environmental risks but also on differences in vulnerability. The recovery process is a crucial and timely opportunity for countries to embark on a more sustainable and gender-equal development path.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to development, environmental sustainability and the achievement of the SDGs. Women play a central role in resilience building and conservation efforts globally, thereby ensuring the well-being of current and future generations. Mainstreaming gender into climate action and other environmental policies can bring about significant economic and well-being benefits to society.

Ensuring a “just transition” to low-carbon economies for women and men can lead to better economic outcomes and more resilient societies. Increasing the participation of women in green innovation can generate high-skilled jobs and boost overall productivity. Sustainable infrastructure (transport, energy, water, etc.) designed with women’s needs in mind can enhance women’s economic empowerment and labour force participation, and improve well-being for all the population. Incorporating gender considerations into public policies such as product labelling, public information campaigns and targeted education programmes can accelerate women’s contribution towards more sustainable consumption patterns and boost the overall sustainability of production and consumption.

1 The OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress, comprising 11 well-being dimensions, has many parallels with the SDG indicators and includes additional dimensions such as relational aspects and subjective well-being (https://www.oecd.org/statistics/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm).
Key gender and environment challenges

Lack of gender-disaggregated data

A basic challenge of addressing and leveraging the gender-environment nexus is gathering the necessary evidence for informed policy decisions. While ample evidence on the gender environment nexus in developing countries can be found in case studies and project reports by UN bodies and other international and non-governmental organisations, systematic data is in short supply. Out of the 231 unique indicators in the SDG framework, 114 are environment-related, and only 20 of these provide for gender specific and/or sex disaggregation, constituting a meagre 9% of the total.

Even for OECD countries, no gender data is systematically available for indicators under eight of the nine environment related SDGs. This is either because indicators are not explicitly identified as gender-related, as is the case for oceans (SDG 14) and biodiversity (SDG 15), or because data is unavailable for a sufficient number of countries, as for water (SDG 6), sustainable production (SDG 12), climate (SDG 13), energy (SDG 7) and cities (SDG 11).

For SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), data is systematically available for only two gender-disaggregated indicators: researchers per million inhabitants and the share of women inventors. An OECD survey on integrating gender in environmental policies showed that only 11 of the 38 OECD member countries replied affirmatively when asked about collecting gender-disaggregated data related to the environment and/or environmental policy making (OECD, 20202).

Figure 2: Only 14 gender-relevant indicators under the environment-related SDGs

Note: In red the SDG indicators identified under the gender-environment nexus. In green the indicators for the environment-related SDGs. In blue the remaining SDG indicators. Source: Authors’ own computations based on UN Global Indicator Framework for the SDGs for determining the environment-related indicators; (Cohen and Shinwell, 2020) analysis provided for gender-related indicators. More analytical information provided in Annex A.

Discrimination and under-representation in leadership

Discrimination and biases against women, as well as biological and behavioural factors and societal roles, leave women disproportionately vulnerable to and affected by unequal access to assets, energy poverty, unsustainable production, inadequate access to water and sanitation, climate change, indoor air pollution, biodiversity loss, and other forms of environmental degradation.

Women are systematically on the front line of natural hazards and suffer most from crime and chronic stress related to inadequate infrastructure and urban development. At the same time, as users of energy and sustainable consumers, women tend to be more sensitive to ecological, environmental and health concerns.

Across OECD countries, women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid domestic work and caregiving (on average almost 18% of their time on these duties, compared to about 9% for men) (OECD, 20203).

With few exceptions, women and girls in low and middle income countries are subject to a much higher degree of discrimination, more legal constraints and limited economic opportunities, compared to those in OECD countries. Discrimination against women is greater overall for access to land assets, when compared to access to non-land assets and formal financial services. Existing obstacles to women’s economic advancement limit their participation in the green economy.

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Advancing women in public and private leadership positions is paramount to ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed into environmental policy and decision making. The benefits are bidirectional, as gender equality and diversity in public and private organisations leads to improved performance and productivity levels. In May 2020, women occupied more than 40% of positions (OECD average) as Ministers of Environment, National Focal Points for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and National Focal Points for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). On the other hand, women are largely under-represented in high-level public positions in areas that are also central to the environment, such as finance, energy and infrastructure planning.

In June 2020, only 4 out of 37 OECD Member countries had women heading their government’s finance portfolio (less than 11%) (Figure 3.3). As such, national agenda setting, finance and budget allocation, as well as land-use and construction prioritisation, still remain largely in the hands of men.

**Insufficient gender mainstreaming in environment-related policies**

OECD countries follow different approaches and include varying levels of gender mainstreaming in environmental and environment-related policies. In response to the OECD survey cited above, 19 OECD countries claimed to consider gender aspects in environmental policy making either occasionally or systematically.

In at least 18 OECD countries, the national environmental authority contributes to implementation of a gender strategy, usually by engaging in disaggregated data collection, gender-based analysis and participation in governance structures for gender mainstreaming in the public administration.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are mostly integrated into policies relating to climate change; green entrepreneurship and green jobs (including in agricultural and forestry sectors). They are also reflected in policies enhancing women’s participation and leadership in environment-related decision making.
Environmental justice at the core of the gender-environment nexus

The gender-environment nexus includes an important environmental justice dimension. Environmental justice implies a fair and inclusive engagement in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation at national and international levels. The global community has recognised environmental justice as a basic human right, but women’s environmental rights and intersectionality, as well as the rights of indigenous women and youth, require further attention.

- In developing countries, women are usually the most affected by the unsustainable use of natural resources and the effects of climate change, such as increased frequency and intensity of pollution.
- Unsustainable use of natural resources and insecure land and water rights may expose indigenous women to violence and abuse by people from outside their communities.
- Women are among those most affected by the increasing effects of climate change in small island developing states (SIDS), as they are often tasked with gathering water, fishing, or farming – all of which are highly affected by natural hazards.
- Women in developed countries are increasingly concerned about the health impacts of hormones, pesticides, and microbiotics and plastics in water and agriculture products.
- Youth are rarely included in decision-making processes and have limited opportunities to raise awareness of their case. While expressing lower levels of trust in governments, young people show strong awareness of inequalities and climate change. In particular, younger generations of women and men are demonstrating their agency to drive change towards more sustainable consumption, travel, and overall lifestyles (OECD, 2018).

While women and youth, especially those in indigenous communities, are more vulnerable to their rights being compromised, they have made remarkable efforts in the fight for conservation, environmental justice and grassroots mobilisation. Across both developed and developing countries, women and youth figure prominently among leading global campaigners against climate change and in ensuring effective environmental protection.

Some philanthropic organisations are also active in the gender equality and environmental justice agenda. Their environmental action illustrates that, in addition to governments and the international community, the private sector also has an important role to play in ensuring environmental and climate justice by realigning its priorities.

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The gender-environment nexus and the SDGs

Examining the interlinkages between gender equality and the environment within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) uncovers a number of underlying systemic and structural gender inequalities and biases. Ingrained biases that are not disclosed nor addressed perpetuate in environment-related decision making and policy design, further exacerbating gender inequalities.

The SDG framework adequately covers gender equality (SDG 5) and environmental goals (the five Planet goals), but considers these objectives separately. Embedding gender in environmental goals could include analysis on i) specific impacts of climate change, environmental damage and biodiversity loss on women, and ii) the role of women in sustainable production and consumption.

The report examines the nine environment-related SDGs (2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15) through a gender-environment lens, supported by comparative data (in the few cases where it is available), case studies, surveys and other evidence.

Chapters dedicated to each SDG illustrate that women around the world are disproportionately affected by climate change, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, growing water scarcity and inadequate sanitation.

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Women and SDG 2 – Promoting sustainable agriculture

Women account for a growing share of agricultural workers. Yet, in much of the developing world, women are more vulnerable than men to hunger and the negative effects of environmental damage caused by unsustainable agricultural practices. In Africa and Asia, women constitute between 43-50% of all farmworkers (FAO, 2016). Nearly 94% of agricultural workers globally are in informal employment. Women are over-represented in unpaid and low-paid seasonal or part-time jobs and are thus likely to be left out of social protection systems (ILO, 2019) (Rapsomanikis, 2015).

Limited access to land rights is the largest barrier for women farmers in much of the developing world (FAO, 2020). Some of these challenges – in particular in relation to skills gaps and representation in decision making – also persist in advanced countries. Tackling discrimination in access to land and natural resources, and addressing gender gaps in education, training and finance, are essential to enable women to increase agricultural productivity and promote more sustainable farming practices.

The role of women

Evidence shows that women adapt as well or more effectively than men to changes that affect their farming, even though women farmers have less access to land, credit, modern technology, improved seeds, and education (Perez et al., 2015). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that enabling women to access productive agricultural resources to the same extent as men could increase yields of women’s farms by 20-30%. This would translate to an increase in total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%, which could reduce global hunger by 12-17% (FAO, 2011). Women are often in charge of the selection, improvement and adaptation of plant varieties when seed selection is done in situ, safeguarding and maintaining seeds and germplasm to be used as planting material in smallholder agricultures (Howard and Cuijpers, 2013) (Vernooy et al., 2017). Women grow more varied crops than men, contributing to farm biodiversity and food security (Kennedy et al., 2017). Applying gender smart solutions for small-scale farming could increase women’s participation in agricultural value chains, with positive effects on poverty reduction, health, and food security.

Women and SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

Despite progress made over the past 20 years, 30% of the global population lacks access to safe water, and over 50% to safe sanitation and hygiene facilities (UNICEF and WHO, 201914).

By 2050, it is estimated that world demand for water will exceed supply by 40% (World Bank, 201615). In many developing countries, the burden placed on women and girls by exposure to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is multifaceted. It can decrease the likelihood that girls attend school, particularly during menstruation.

Travel to water resources and culturally defined expectations in relation to water management can leave women vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV).

The role of women

Women’s knowledge of local natural resources and skills in household water management can be leveraged to shape conservation efforts through awareness-building campaigns.

Enhancing women’s access to safe water has positive effects on social inclusion, poverty alleviation, health, environmental sustainability and food security.

Involving women in water and sanitation management, taking their needs into account, and including them in budgeting decisions can help orientate scarce funding towards sustainable solutions that benefit communities as a whole (Sandys, 200516).

Enhancing women’s access to safe water has positive effects on social inclusion, poverty alleviation, health, environmental sustainability and food security.

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Women and SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy

Access to affordable, sustainable and clean energy is a precondition for gender equality and well-being. However, around 170 million people, about three-quarters of them in Sub-Saharan Africa, have no access to electricity. The COVID-19 pandemic is reversing a six-year positive trend in energy access in Africa; the number of people lacking electricity on the continent increased by 2% in 2020 compared to the year before (IEA, 202017) (OECD, 202018). In some OECD countries, it is estimated that up to 30% of households live in energy poverty (USEA, 201919). The welfare cost from deaths associated with indoor air pollution from heating and cooking is higher for women both in OECD and non-OECD countries (OECD, 20211).

This is consistent with findings in developing countries that men spend more time outdoors, including for travelling to work, while women spend more time working inside the home (WHO, 201620).

The role of women

Extending access to green energy and promoting energy affordability for all is central to the achievement of more inclusive and sustainable development. As primary energy managers in households, women in both developed and developing countries can play a key role in the green energy transition as responsible consumers and in business and policy making.

Women’s empowerment and leadership in the energy sector can help accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy by promoting clean energy and more efficient energy use, thereby also helping to tackle energy poverty.

The “just transition” should include a gender perspective to guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in the energy sector.

Figure 5: Welfare cost of premature deaths from indoor pollution in %, by gender

Note: Indoor air pollution refers to household air pollution from fossil fuels. Data on mortality and DALYs from exposure to environmental risks are taken from GBD (2019), Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 Results. Welfare costs are calculated using a methodology adapted from OECD (2017b), The Rising Cost of Ambient Air Pollution thus far in the 21st Century: Results from the BRIICS and the OECD Countries.

Women and SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Infrastructure development is fundamental to economic growth and to creating economic opportunities for vulnerable groups. At the same time, major infrastructure projects, particularly in the transport sector, can harm the environment and local communities where women are often most affected by land displacement, human rights abuses (including sexual crime and violence) and weak labour rights.

Moreover, the growth of industrial sectors and the move to service and knowledge-based economies are rarely gender-neutral. While industrialisation has created employment opportunities for women in the developing world, many women remain in low-skilled, low-paid, assembly line-type jobs. The report shows that take-up of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects among women and girls is still very low, reaching only 15% on average across all countries and technology domains (OECD, 2021[21]). Skills gaps, social norms, biases and labour market discrimination all figure into the large gender gap in decision making positions in the infrastructure, green innovation and digital sectors.

The role of women

Women’s participation in science and innovation can both enrich research and help overturn long-held beliefs and social norms regarding their role. The report presents a number of examples of how greater gender equality in senior management in industry and infrastructure can help accelerate efforts towards sustainability. Greater inclusion of women in inventive activities is good not only for women themselves, but also for stronger economic growth and enhanced societal well-being. Inventions arising out of mixed teams, or women-only groups, appear to have wider technological breadth and higher impact from a technological viewpoint than those in which only men are involved (OECD, 2018[22]).

![Figure 6: Boards of Directors in all industries remain largely male](image-url)

Source: OECD Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and their Affiliates (ADIMA).

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Women and SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

Growing urbanisation, combined with the expanding world population, is exacerbating a number of social and environmental challenges. Air pollution is especially damaging to the health of women (in particular during pregnancy), children and the elderly (Bové et al., 2019). Women account for an over proportionate share of low-income citizens and tend to live closest to the most polluted parts of cities.

They are generally more sensitive to time constraints and put a higher opportunity cost on travel time because of their different household responsibilities (ITF, 2019). Women who rely on public transport are disproportionately affected by safety and security concerns.

Inadequate and unsafe transport infrastructure has a greater negative impact on women’s economic opportunities when compared to those of men. Following natural disasters, women, especially in low-income urban areas, are burdened with most of the increased domestic work (ITF, 2018).

The role of women

Women’s transport and mobility preferences tend to be more sustainable than those of men, and women follow more sustainable travel patterns (Polk, 2003) (Polk, 2004) (Samek Lodovici et al., 2012).

Adapting public transport to women’s needs, in particular regarding safety and multimodality, could lead to more sustainable transport patterns overall and improve women’s well-being and economic opportunities.

Better representation of women in urban design and planning roles can help make cities and settlements more women-sensitive, ultimately optimising infrastructure for all the population.

28 Sarreke Lodovici, M. et al. (2012), The role of women in the green economy-The issue of mobility-NOTE.
Women and SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

More sustainable consumption and production patterns are essential for reducing environmental damage, protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, and tackling climate change. Unsustainable production has different effects on women and men, both as producers and consumers. Women are often dependent for subsistence on strained natural resources, and affected by poor labour conditions in a “feminised” workforce.

In developing countries, women also provide a large amount of informal and sometimes unpaid work related to waste management. Health risks in the waste sector are widely acknowledged, with increasing attention to the consequences of heavy metals exposure from e-waste on women’s and maternal health (Heacock et al., 201629) (Kim et al., 202030). Similarly, women are overrepresented in assembly-line type jobs, which tend to be low-paid and characterised by poor working conditions and heavy exposure to chemicals. Policies such as fossil fuel subsidies can be both damaging for the environment and asymmetric in how they benefit women and men financially.

The role of women

Given women’s role in local communities, engagement with household tasks, and consumption patterns, women are likely to benefit greatly from a shift towards a circular economy and better waste management. Women tend to be more sustainable consumers and are more sensitive to ecological, environmental and health concerns.

They are more likely to recycle, minimise wastage, buy organic food and eco-labelled products, and engage in water and energy savings initiatives at the household level (OECD, 201731) (Davies and Kudzai, 201632) (World Bank, 201533) (Brennan, 201534). Engaging women in the circular economy, raising awareness of sustainable consumption and encouraging participation in leadership and managerial roles, is indispensable for creating efficient circular systems. Gender-responsive skills strategies that strengthen women’s career opportunities in green economy sectors can improve value chains and help to achieve gender equality.

Women and SDG 13 – Climate Action

Women are, in general, more vulnerable to climate change due to their dependence on natural resources and structural inequity in their ability to access and control them. Women are more likely to be affected by increasingly severe environmental hazards, accounting for more than 75% of displaced persons (UNHCR, 2019). Social and economic norms tend to exacerbate the cumulative effects of climate-related events. While the Paris Agreement stresses the contribution of gender equality and women’s empowerment to fighting climate change and the specific impact of climate change on women, few countries have effectively integrated a gender perspective into their impact assessments, national adaptation plans (NAPs) and other response strategies.

The role of women

Putting women at the centre of climate action requires a comprehensive policy framework that improves women’s position vis-à-vis each SDG. For instance, population growth in the context of unsustainable consumption patterns is a contributing factor to climate change.

A comprehensive framework of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including voluntary family planning solutions and reproductive health services, together with improved access to education, can have a substantial effect on population growth and reduce humans’ carbon footprint (i.e. through reduced demand for food and resources, waste and transportation) (Murtaugh and Schlax, 2009) (Smith et al., 2014). As women and men express different preferences, perceptions and beliefs when it comes to acting in environmentally friendly ways, women can play a key role in specific climate change mitigation efforts such as substantially reducing meat consumption, energy consumption, and polluting transport. (INSEE, 2020) (OECD, 2008) (IPSOS, 2018). Arriving at these solutions requires recognising the synergies and trade-offs between well-being outcomes and climate action and better understanding the role women can play. Increasing the presence of women in leadership positions in the public and private sectors can reflect these experiences and accelerate climate action, as women leaders often put a strong focus on tackling climate change and ensuring environmental sustainability.
Women and SDG 14 – Life under Water

Tackling marine litter and pollution is crucial for healthy oceans and for human health. Pregnant women and children in particular are highly sensitive to toxic materials found in fish (Lloyd-Smith and Immig BAppSc, 201841). Microplastics have the ability to cross the placental barrier and affect unborn children.

Negative feedback loops between human-induced damage to the oceans and climate change are reaching tipping points with potentially devastating consequences: studies show that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster (UNDP, 201642) (UNDP, 201643).

Despite these challenges, women continue to be underrepresented in related leadership positions, occupying only 20% of the workforce in fishing and aquaculture, and often hold lower paid jobs in the fishing industry (ILO, 202044).

The role of women

Women around the world are showing a remarkable commitment to the protection of marine ecosystems and the sustainable use of marine resources, including through local initiatives such as, for example, regeneration of mangroves and protection of coastal areas.

Tackling discrimination, ensuring access to finance and developing skills are essential for such initiatives to prosper. Leadership promotion has an edge in ocean science: women represent on average 38% of researchers in the field, about 10% higher than in science overall (UNESCO, 201745). However, women’s full integration into the blue economy needs policy that recognises women’s harvest and post-harvest work and provides access to credit and markets.
Women and SDG 15 – Life on Land

Women can be significantly affected by biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystems. Women and indigenous groups living in rural areas are particularly affected by soil depletion and reduced water supply, which can exacerbate poverty and hunger.

Lack of access to land, forests and other natural resources is a major cause of deprivation for women, especially those in indigenous communities that depend on shared, ancestral lands.

In addition, activities that contribute to ecosystem degradation, such as industrial farming, extractive industries and major infrastructure projects, have been linked to gender-based violence.

The role of women

As farmers and pastoralists with primary responsibility for household food production, women in many developing countries are the principal users and managers of land.

Their role is an opportunity to achieve the dual objective of sustainable land management and gender equality.

Yet the SDGs are silent on the heightened impacts of environmental degradation on women (which could be included in SDG Target 15.6) and the potential of engaging women in conservation efforts. Further efforts are needed to embed gender responsive indicators throughout the post-2020 biodiversity framework.
Key policy actions

In addition to expanding the evidence base, leveraging the gender-environment nexus requires the design and implementation of an integrated policy framework along three vectors.

- **Transboundary policies**
  - Integrate gender-environment considerations into trade and investment, development
  - Women’s voice in public consultations

- **Domestic environment-related policies**
  - Environmental policies and regulations
  - Tax, subsidies and budgeting
  - Sectoral policies (infrastructure, urban development, farming, etc.)

- **Gender equality and women’s empowerment**
  - Equal rights
  - Tackling discrimination (including on employment and access to finance)
  - Women in decision-making
1. Advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in environment-related sectors, including equal access to quality education, health and other social services.

Key actions include:

• Removing legal barriers and supporting employment policies and practices

• Supporting gender parity in public and private decision-making bodies.

2. Integrating a gender angle into national environmental strategies and policies.

Key actions include:

• Gathering gender-disaggregated evidence to understand the impact of environmental stressors on women, women’s behaviour towards the environment and their contributions to conservation and sustainability.

• Applying a gender lens to the design of national environmental policies and specific plans on climate change, biodiversity, oceans, and circular economy.

• Establishing environmental standards and applying gender impact assessments (GIAs) to environmental policies.

• Adapting environmental taxation, subsidies and budgetary tools to account for gender segregation; “genderising” sectors such as energy, transport and farming.

• Providing access to finance and technology for green initiatives driven by women and that support women’s empowerment.

3. Mainstreaming a gender angle into the environmental aspects of transboundary policies such as trade, foreign direct investment, responsible business conduct, and development co-operation. Businesses investing abroad should be also required to integrate the gender-environment nexus into their investment decisions.

Key actions include:

• Integrating gender aspects into trade agreements, e.g. by including clauses specific to SMEs, where women’s economic activity tends to be concentrated.

• Promoting gender equality and environmental goals in investment policies and private-sector codes of conduct. The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and Due Diligence Guidance on Responsible Business Conduct call on the private sector to avoid contributing to adverse impacts through their own activities or to mitigate such impacts in their supply chains; integration of these guidelines into business practice could support transformative action.

• Supporting co-operation efforts that integrate gender equality into mitigation-oriented climate finance, in particular for economic infrastructure including transport and energy. In particular, more support is needed to improve opportunities for women in developing countries to participate in the green economy.
### Additional specific actions to each environment-related SDG

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<th>SDG 2</th>
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<td>• Bridge the data gap, building on other international organisations’ efforts such as UNESCO’s World Water Assessment Programme</td>
<td>• Promote the participation of women, including from indigenous communities, in local, national and international decision-making bodies, and in the energy industry itself, at all policy-making stages</td>
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<td>• Engage women and indigenous communities in decision making</td>
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**SDG 2**

- Build gender-sensitive, place-based approaches that acknowledge women’s role in managing local communities
- Eliminate legal barriers to land ownership
- Engage women and indigenous communities in decision making
- Strengthen women’s leadership in the agricultural sector (both in government and the private sector).
- Ensure gender mainstreaming when providing finance, financial literacy, digital skills for scaling up sustainable agricultural production methods, and market access

**SDG 6**

- Integrate gender considerations into co-operative water management projects and ensure consultation of communities
- Bridge the data gap, building on other international organisations’ efforts such as UNESCO’s World Water Assessment Programme
- Review governance arrangements for water management projects to promote gender equality in decision making and ensure consultation
- Environmental and social assessments of large water management projects should include a gender dimension

**SDG 7**

- Align energy policies with the needs of women, especially in countries with a high incidence of energy poverty
- Promote the participation of women, including from indigenous communities, in local, national and international decision-making bodies, and in the energy industry itself, at all policy-making stages
- Support study of STEM subjects by girls
- Promote more equal sharing of unpaid household work by men and women
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<td>• Ensure the application of responsible business conduct and due diligence in supply chains</td>
<td>• Develop whole-of-city initiatives on women’s safety</td>
<td>• Develop gender-responsive skills strategies to strengthen women’s career opportunities in green economy sectors</td>
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<td>• Develop a more inclusive digital infrastructure by enhancing access and reducing digital divides for rural women</td>
<td>• Mainstream gender into natural disaster resilience strategies and actions</td>
<td>• Develop a better understanding of consumer behaviour across genders, e.g. with up-to-date surveys on gender differences in consumer attitudes to sustainability and their drivers</td>
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<td>• Ensure that major infrastructure projects undergo an independent, environmental and social impact assessment</td>
<td>• Urban design based on multi-functional neighbourhoods with short travel distances, childcare and schools, health care and shopping services, to help parents combine work and family duties</td>
<td>• Ensure a systematic gender equality perspective on circular economy strategies targeting gender roles and consumption preferences</td>
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<td>• Develop programmes to increase the uptake of scientific research by women</td>
<td>• Promote corporate practices such as flexible working hours and teleworking to facilitate women’s access to full-time work while reducing carbon footprint</td>
<td>• Rationalise inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies and further research the effect of fossil fuel subsidy reform on women</td>
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<td>• Consider mechanisms, including quotas and affirmative measures, for increased participation by women in senior management positions in industry</td>
<td>• Support the development of community networks that promote sharing of responsibilities and gender equality</td>
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<td>SDG 13</td>
<td>SDG 14</td>
<td>SDG 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Collect better sex-disaggregated data on climate change impacts and make use of Gender Impact Assessments (GIA)</td>
<td>• Design and implement legislation that enables and supports associations, organisations and networks of women within the fisheries and aquaculture</td>
<td>• Embed gender-responsive indicators throughout the post-2020 biodiversity framework, following initial steps by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
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<td>• Apply gender budgeting in climate policy</td>
<td>• Design policy solutions with a gender-lens, addressing the specific differentiated concerns of degrading oceans, including the impact of coastal storms, the depletion of fish stocks and the increase in marine litter.</td>
<td>• Empower women through private land titles and agricultural production but also by addressing women’s access shared resources from forests and commons, especially in indigenous communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review decision-making processes and support women’s leadership in climate sensitive policies.</td>
<td>• Ensure women’s full integration in the blue economy through policy that recognises women’s work in harvest and post-harvest and provides access to credit and markets</td>
<td>• Integrate gender considerations into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). In particular, by ensuring gender balanced decision making and access to technology and finance for women-led projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Continue to integrate a joint gender and environmental dimension into development co-operation efforts, specifically into ODA</td>
<td>• Mainstream gender in development co-operation targeting the sustainable management of oceans</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Co-ordinate with private sector and civil society that produce quantitative and qualitative work in the field to improve understanding of climate change effects</td>
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Gender and the Environment: Building the Evidence Base and Advancing Policy Actions to Achieve the SDGs

Gender equality and environmental goals are mutually reinforcing, with slow progress on environmental actions affecting the achievement of gender equality, and vice versa. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires targeted and coherent actions.

However, complementarities and trade-offs between gender equality and environmental sustainability are scarcely documented within the SDG framework. Based on the SDG framework, this report provides an overview of the gender-environment nexus, looking into data and evidence gaps, economic and well-being benefits, and governance and justice aspects. It examines nine environment-related SDGs (2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 15) through a gender-environment lens, using available data, case studies, surveys and other evidence. It shows that women around the world are disproportionately affected by climate change, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, growing water scarcity and inadequate sanitation, with gender inequalities further exacerbated by COVID-19.

The report concludes that gender-responsiveness in areas such as land, water, energy and transport management, amongst others, would allow for more sustainable and inclusive economic development, and increased well-being for all. Recognising the multiple dimensions of and interactions between gender equality and the environment, it proposes an integrated policy framework, taking into account both inclusive growth and environmental considerations at local, national and international levels.

For further reading on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals, see the following report on which these policy highlights are based:


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