

# Education for Sustainable Development and Gender: The Nexus for the Future

持続可能な開発のための教育とジェンダー  
—未来へつなぐもの—

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Distinguished participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, It is my great honour to address you, the audience of the International Symposium titled “Sustainability and Gender.”

Gender and sustainable development are the two topics of great importance in their own right. My job here today is to explore together with you the crossroad where the two concepts interface with each other in relation to education and what that crossroad may mean to us present in this meeting and also to the other stakeholders of gender, sustainable development and education.

Before looking at the specific linkage between education for sustainable development (ESD) and gender, which is the focus of my speech, kindly allow me to touch upon the broad issue of gender and sustainable development.

Much has been said about the inextricable linkage between the two topics. If you type in their key words on internet, you will receive a long list of articles and publications. And there are as many different perspectives on their relation as the number of articles and publications on them.

Some people see the linkage between the two concepts more from the perspective of respecting universal values and principles that need to be ensured in a sustainable society. A sustainable society is to respect justice, human rights, equality, non-discrimination, non-violence, diversity and other related universal principles of humanity. A society cannot be sustained if its members are subject to perpetual and systemic forces that do not warrant their rights to live with dignity as human beings, fulfilling their potentials. From this rights-based perspective, gender inequality is one of the incompatible principles for a sustainable society and therefore it must be addressed for elimination.

Others focus more on the specific roles women can play, vis-à-vis their male counterparts of the society in ensuring sustainable development. For them, how women manage local natural resources in

relation to their traditional roles in securing food, water and energy for cooking is an issue directly related to sustainable development. Women's participation in the unstable subsistence economy in many developing countries is also a concern to address.

Women's role in sustainable development can also be manifested in their reproduction and education processes for the next generation within their own households. Women can also build strong social networks within their communities and through those networks they can mobilise the forces to bring about necessary changes. They can play an important role in the collective management of risks and vulnerability.

For these significant short and long-term impacts they can make on sustainable development through their reproduction, production and social processes, women are often called agents of change. Economists and likewise pundits talk about the costs that a society eventually has to pay if it does not invest in the education and health care of its main agents of change.

Still others say that gender and sustainable development need to be addressed together closely, because their linkage is in fact ignored or denied more often than not. Disadvantaged in access to education, women are more likely to become inadvertent victims of their hazardous environment, or inadvertent offenders creating a hazardous environment. They are more likely to become disadvantaged by development.

Yet, their voices on their plights can be stereotyped and are not taken seriously. There are fundamental blockages for women to contribute to the building of a sustainable society, and the hampering biases come from the deep-seated values systems of the society on gender role. Women need to be empowered to raise voice and have their causes heard. Simple expansion of women's participation in the society and its decision making processes is not enough. There have to be systemic transformations of their environments and the millions of systems that constitute those environments.

Where does education come into play in this nexus of gender and sustainable development that need to be addressed as a matter of principle, for the valid pragmatism and/or as part of the critical theory?

Saving water and energy is not just a behavioral choice we can teach and force through education and education only. Knowledge and information on why we need to manage our natural resources more sensibly helps, but their impact on our actual behavior will be limited, if the overall systemic environments that govern our daily lives are heavily dependent on the use of natural resources.

If education is needed for sustainable development, it is not just to deliver the knowledge and information about sustainable development. The ultimate purpose of education for sustainable development is to cultivate the learners' critical and systemic thinking, encouraging them to challenge assumptions, values and predispositions underlying surface phenomena so as for them to find solutions that are sustainable and that will bring about sustainable results.

Transformative pedagogy, thus, is not just a pedagogical tool for ESD. It itself is the purpose of ESD. Importantly, it is in this transformative pedagogy where ESD lends its inextricable linkages to other issues of the society, including gender inequality.

Incorporating gender issues in ESD courses would not be enough, if the learners are not challenged to analyze and debate on not only the values, but also the institutional systems that generate gender inequality. Highlighting the specific contributions women can make, vis-à-vis their male counterparts of the society, to sustainable development, runs the risk of acknowledging and perpetuating the stereotyped roles and responsibilities of different sexes.

If the ESD course on gender is based on transformative pedagogy, it will invite the learners to check on the underlying assumptions. If an ESD course on gender promotes transformative pedagogy, it will pay attention not only to the contents of the course, but also to the environment in which the course is delivered. It will pose the question, for example, of whether the learners of both sexes are treated equally and whether the teachers of both sexes are represented fairly.

One of the biggest challenges we face in building a sustainable society, addressing such critical issues as gender inequality through and in education, is none other than education itself. For many decades, education has been considered the crucial instrument for generating individual and national prosperity. Relevance of education has been spoken about mostly in the context of how education can produce labor force that will meet the needs of the labor market. Emphasis has been on cognitive learning and the skills that will help the learners to find jobs afterwards. Learning outcomes are measured and assessed. What is not measurable is not targeted.

Education systems that value their utility in generating individual and national wealth give little room for the kind of education that is reflective and challenges the existing systems and values. Education has pursued interests of individuals and individual communities and countries. Education's critical contribution to the wellbeing of the collectives, wellbeing of not just one individual, or one individual country, but of the global community and of the humanity has not been addressed sufficiently.

There is, however, a wind of change that is blowing. The current discourse on post-2015 turns our attention, for the first time in decades, to the role of education in building a peaceful and sustainable world. Acquiring knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development is being proposed as one of the targets for the education goal for post 2015. Also included in that target is education, among others, on sustainable lifestyles, gender equality, global citizenship, and culture's contribution to sustainable development. Time has come to recognize the importance of education not only that measures but also that matters.

This is a small change vis-à-vis what needs to be done, but a giant transition vis-à-vis what has been the status quo. Education is recognized not only as a means for acquiring skills and knowledge, but also as an essential tool for attaining wellbeing goals for the humanity. If gender and sustainable development are indeed the issue that needs to be addressed seriously, their crossroad will thus be best housed in education and education for sustainable development, of which ultimate purpose is to transform the systems of the society for sustainability.

Before I close, I would like to thank the organisers of this symposium, Ochanomizu University and the United Nations University, for giving UNESCO the opportunity to address the audience.

I understand that during the symposium, the experiences of the people who were affected by the accident of the nuclear power station in Fukushima will be reviewed as a case in point. There are many lessons we can learn from such accidents. Most of all, I hope the vision of sustainable and equitable society will serve as a driving force for the people in pain and despair. They shall stand up and face the challenges of today to build a better society and the future we all want.

I wish you all a very successful meeting.

Thank you.