

Philosophy of Sustainable Development: Understanding the Significance of Gender Equality in Business Organisations

Filozofia zrównoważonego rozwoju: Zrozumienie znaczenia równości płci w zarządzaniu organizacjami biznesowymi

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a significant concern for practitioners, researchers, and activists. Literature on this area has shown that gender inequality is one of the biggest hurdles in the process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Business leaders, policymakers, politicians, practitioners, and researchers from all fields should understand the significance of gender equality, without which it is impossible to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. The UN gives a call to countries and individuals to make some effort to achieve gender equality. It directly refers to the target of SDG5 and indirectly the other dimensions, including poverty, girl-child education, economy, child death ratios, forced marriage, violence against women, etc. Gender equality is an axiological appraisal to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. For that, this paper tries to determine the necessity of gender equality in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. It mainly focuses on two objectives first one is the necessity of gender equality, and the second one is the role of business organizations in achieving gender equality.

Keywords: gender equality, sustainable development, business organizations, women empowerment

Streszczenie

Zrównoważony rozwój jest głównym przedmiotem zainteresowania praktyków, badaczy i aktywistów. Literatura dotycząca tego obszaru pokazuje, że nierówność płci jest jedną z największych przeszkód w procesie realizacji Celów zrównoważonego rozwoju (SDG). Liderzy biznesowi, decydenci, politycy, praktycy i badacze ze wszystkich dziedzin powinni zrozumieć znaczenie równości płci, bez której niemożliwe jest osiągnięcie celów zrównoważonego rozwoju. ONZ apeluje do krajów i jednostek o podjęcie pewnych wysiłków na rzecz osiągnięcia równości płci. Odnosi się to bezpośrednio do celu SDG5, a pośrednio do innych celów, w tym ubóstwo, edukację dziewcząt, gospodarkę, wskaźniki śmiertelności dzieci, przymusowe małżeństwa, przemoc wobec kobiet itp. Równość płci jest aksjologiczną oceną osiągania celów zrównoważonego rozwoju. Niniejszy artykuł próbuje określić konieczność równouprawnienia płci w osiąganiu celów zrównoważonego rozwoju. Skupia się głównie na dwóch celach, z których pierwszy to konieczność równości płci, a drugi to rola organizacji biznesowych w osiąganiu równości płci.

Słowa kluczowe: równość płci, zrównoważony rozwój, organizacje biznesowe, upodmiotowienie kobiet

1. Introduction

In 2015, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda 2030 in New York, replacing the Millennium Development Goals. SDGs consist of three pillars, seventeen goals, and one sixty-nine targets (Catana

& Brilha, 2020; Hudáková et al., 2022). The primary motto of this agenda is peace and prosperity for all. Development toward SDGs is not effective. It happened for various reasons; however, gender inequality is among them. Studies have shown that gender equality and climate change have become major concerns in SDGs (Razavi, 2016; Reckien et al., 2017). Every individual, including practitioners, researchers, and activist, are worried about how to resolve these issues. SDGs are not a new concept; still, their development is slow, which puts a question mark. The time has come to modify and adopt such strategies, which lead us to achieve SDGs. Literature in the area of sustainable development has shown that we are unable to achieve the goal of sustainable development until we achieve gender equality (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016; Sen, 2019). In the era twenty-first century, *the challenges of building pathways to sustainability and enhancing gender equality are both urgent* (Leach et al., 2016). The time has come to realize the significance of gender equality, *The World Economic Forum (2016) published the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), which examines gender inequality across four key areas: health, education, economy, and politics* (Kim, 2017). However, it's a fact that after 2016, many countries have progressed in reducing the gender gap, but it is still limited. It needs some depth effort to minimize the gap, and as a result, it helps in achieving gender equality. For that, this paper highlights the significance of gender equality for sustainable development and suggests business organizations as a way to minimize gender inequality and enhance women's empowerment. It not only affects SDG5 but also simultaneously resolves several issues, namely women's violations, forced marriage, child death ratios, unemployment, etc. Time needs a philosophical study of gender equality and sustainable development.

2. Sustainable Development: An Overview

In order to understand sustainable development, one must have a clear and distinct understanding of sustainability. The concept of sustainability is raised when there is a significant difference between what is said and what is done. A fundamental concept of *sustainability* is something that can sustain through time. However, the idea of *sustainability* always has a dispositional quality that is difficult to define in a specific sphere. *Many of the notions about sustainability that are largely taken for granted today originated in the work of the United Nations world commission on environment and development, often referred to as the Brundtland Commission* (Portney, 2015). However, *the word sustainability has a history; the concept of sustainable development was adopted as a reaction to environmental problems and the outbreak of social injustice brought about by the industrial revolutions* (Lenka & Kar, 2021). Studies have shown that Industrial revolutions have positive and negative aspects on the environment and society. It gave birth to the notion of sustainability, which is founded on two fundamental ideas: one, co-modifying nature, and two, society is made up of only humans. These two concepts have resulted in an exceptional transformation in the improvement process by bringing people's performance on a regular habitat to a new level. No doubt people want development, but not on the basis of environmental and societal degradation. In the word of the Brundtland Commission, Sustainability means meeting the requirements of present generations without hampering the basic requirement of future generations (WCED, 1987). Sustainability consists of three pillars societal, environmental, and economic (Domańska et al., 2019). Three of them are essential to achieve the target of SDGs. The United Nations' World Commission on Sustainable Development includes these three, namely social, economic, and environmental concerns, as three interconnected pillars of Sustainable Development (Luetz & Walid, 2019). Only by achieving and cumulatively contending these three factors would one be able to attain sustainable development since each has interrelated worth, and the absence of any of them will block others. Three of them are essential for healthy growth. It is sometimes stated that focusing primarily on the environmental and social components of sustainable development may result in a financial crisis, as economic capital is essential for the country's growth. Growing sustainable development principles while ignoring environmental issues will damage natural capital, which is required for green growth. Relying on environmental conservation and economic growth while ignoring social development would degrade the effectiveness of green growth (Elkington, 2004; Heijungs et al., 2010). The time has come to understand that a single undertaking cannot be enough to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

The concept of sustainable development arises from the changing aspects of the human experience on the subject of development. It improves the well-being of people by raising their living standards through health and education, as well as providing them with an equitable opportunity for all aspects of economic development. Nigeria set an example of how these factors affect Sustainable Development Goals *Nigeria, like most other nations of the world, signed this treaty and promised to work towards the realization of this goal* (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016) but unfortunately failed. Studies have shown that in the era of twenty-first-century, poverty is a challenge, especially in countries like India and Bangladesh. As per the UN report, *nearly 60 percent of the world's 1 billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries in 2011: India, Nigeria, China, Bangladesh, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). Time has come to understand the philosophy of sustainable development; it's a fact that it's not a one-way dimension to achieve the target. It needs strategy and proper planning at the same time, needs collaborations. For that, every nation put effort into fulfilling the targets of the SDG, a set of seventeen objectives and multidimensional targets. In order to achieve these seventeen targets,

we must consider gender equality in our strategy. Gender equality is one of the challenges to achieving SDGs; even the UN gives a call to individual and business organizations to make some effort to reduce gender equality. Along with SDG5, gender equality helps to enhance education, women's empowerment, and control poverty, hunger, child death ratio, and forced marriage.

3. Gender Equality is an Axiological Appraisal for SDGs

Gender equality is one of the major goals of sustainable development; it consists of 9 sub-goals (see figure 1), a large number in nature and scope, including various fields, namely economy, politics, society, education, etc. It is a challenge to achieve and maintain a balance between the nine sub-goals. It's a fact that achieving gender equality is quite challenging for every sector, including academics, business, society, etc. time has come to highlight the significance of gender equality. It is one of the urgent challenges for many nations to achieve sustainable development. Studies have shown the worst performance of South Asia towards gender equality (Bhopal, 2019; Branisa et al., 2014). The survey conducted by World Economic Forum on Global Gender Gap Report 2021 depicts India's position as 140 out of 156 countries. The nation has dropped 28 positions, ranking behind Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar (SDG 17 – partnerships for the goals). World economic forum claims that the next generation of women will wait a long for gender equality. Due to the impact of COVID-19, *the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years* (Global Gender Gap Report 2021). Achieving gender equality become a hot debate for practitioners, researchers, and activists. Through Gender equality, nations hit SDG5, along with managing the increasing graph of child death ratio, poverty, hunger, violence, unemployment, etc. Every field should highlight the need for gender equality, especially the four fields, namely economics, education, health, and politics. These fields have the capacity to make an impact on the graph of gender inequality. For that, nations should work on four dimensions, including *Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment*, to move the tracks toward Sustainable Development Goals (figure 2) (Global gender gap report, 2021). These are the four essential pillars to achieve gender equality, and practitioners, researchers, and activists should focus on these four pillars of gender equality to minimize the gender inequality gap. The first dimension is economic equality; in 1963, *in Washington, congress passed an equal pay act bill* (Fuchs, 1988). Even after that, *years later, title VII of the Civil right act would prohibit all forms of discrimination in employment* (Fuchs, 1988). No doubt women's economic advancement has increased, but still, it's slow. It's a fact that women who are engaged in the workplace enhance their economic equality, proving their versatility. Studies have shown that Women have been the driving force behind prosperous commercial enterprises since the 17th century. However, the unfortunate thing is that they are few in positions of leadership. As per the census data report, the total number of main forces female workforce in India raised from 64273909 in the year 1991 to 89355595 in 2011 (Census 1991, 2011). Similarly, the UNwomen.org report shows that 4% of women capture CEO positions in the global workforce. The time has come to highlight women's empowerment in leadership positions and decision-making roles. Several role models are available who prove women leaders can lead the workplace in a better way they are such as Kamala Harris, vice president of the united states, Nirmala Shitaraman, finance minister in the Ministry of India, Sandra Day O'Connor, former supreme court justice, Emmeline Pankhurst British political activist, Marry Barra, CE at general motors, etc. The second dimension of gender equality in education, equality of education for women and girls' children, is one of the sub-goals of SDG 5. Education plays a significant role in minimizing the gap in gender equality (Wrigley, 2003; Pande et al., 2005; Ramachandran, 2009). R Pande et al. (2005) examines how women's educations help families and society in their research entitled *Impact of Investments in female education on gender equality*. They examine the four broad aspects of gender equality in their studies these are namely health and hygiene, position in family and society, economic equality, and political equality. Their studies show the significance of education and the necessity of women's education. However, they claim that education is not a sufficient investment; other factors also matter in achieving gender equality. For them, *education has a consistently favourable impact on women's well-being and gender equality for only two outcomes, namely, maternal health and women's mobility* (Pande et al., 2005). In the word of the World Bank and the United Nations, the *Education of girls, as well as issues relating to sexuality and fertility, more equitable inheritance laws and practices, and increased voice of women in society, are seen as the most critical for development* (Mikkola & Miles, 2007). Gayathri & Karthikeyan (2015) in their studies, shows that *for a society to reach its true potential and the optimum level of growth, it is imperative for them to give equal stature and importance to women in society*. Similarly, other aspects, including political equality and health and hygiene, have a great impact on women and gender equality (Tiwary, 2018; Amaya et al., 2002). Somehow every nation grows towards the SDG, but, unfortunately, after COVID-19, the scenario has changed. Studies have shown that after the COVID-19 pandemic, these four pillars have been affected a lot; *the gender gap in the political sphere remains the largest: Women occupy only 26.1 percent of the 35,500 parliament seats and are just 22.6 percent of the 3,400 ministers globally. In 81 countries, there has never been a woman head of state as of January 15, 2021* (SDG 17 – partnerships for the goals). One can find out the same scenario in India, *India has declined on the political empowerment index as we by 13.5 percent in 2019 to 9.1 percent in 2021* (SDG 17

– partnerships for the goals). Similarly, when it comes to educational attainment, India's rank stands at 114. The two indices where India fared the worst, however, are the health and survival sub-index, with the rank of 155 (a spot ahead of China), and the economic participation of women. With respect to the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index, India is among the bottom ten globally because the estimated earned income of women in India is only one-fifth that of men in the country (SDG 17 – partnerships for the goals). UN, suggest collaboration to achieve the goal of SDG and gives a call to business organizations. Business organizations play a vital role in minimizing gender inequality. Business organizations are a platform that affects our society a lot. UN proposes that business organizations adopt and modify some strategies with the goals of SDGs. The situations need collaboration basically from the government and organizations. The business organization has a great impact to minimize the gender equality gap. For that, we analyze the impact of business organizations and business leaders in achieving gender equality in the next sections. Business organizations and those who run business organizations have a great impact on our society. Several studies support that the goal has numerous benefits that help to achieve Sustainable Development Goals through SDG 5.



Figure 1. SDG5 with Sub-goals, source: <https://sdgs.un.org>

In order to achieve gender equality, business organizations and government policy must focus on four dimensions, as we already discussed in the above sections (figure 2). Several studies have supported that economic, health and hygiene, educational equality, and political equality have a great impact on achieving gender equality. Studies have shown that *it has strong synergies with other SDGs, notably Gender Equality (SDG 5), No Poverty (SDG 1), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) & Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6)* (Venkatesh, 2022). Domańska et al. (2019) have shown how a smaller gender gap related to educational attainment and political empowerment of females is

connected positively with higher levels of sustainable development of the three pillars in specific countries (Domańska et al., 2019). On the one side, gender equality controls poverty, hunger, child death ratio, violence against women, and forced marriage, and on the other side enhances women's empowerment and girls' child education, as a result, fulfills the targets of Sustainable Development Goals.

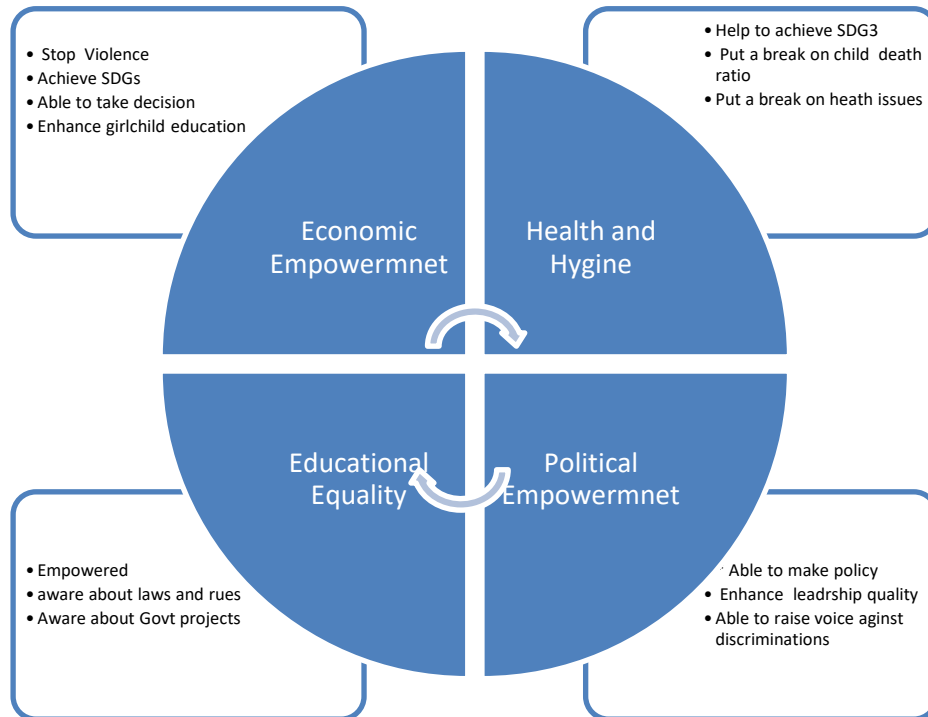


Figure 2. Four Dimensions of Gender Equality, source: Global gender gap report, 2021

4. Role of the Business Organization to Achieve Gender Equality

Business organizations play a significant role in achieving gender equality along with other SDG sub-goals (Casey et al., 2011; Taneja et al., 2012; Levin & Faith-Ell, 2019; Mardiharini et al., 2021). Business organizations should adopt and reform such strategies with the target of Sustainable Development Goals. That enhances women's empowerment and reduces the gender inequality gap. For that, organizations should give the opportunity to women in leadership positions. A few decades ago, women were involved in the workforce; they proved their versatility in various fields. Still, their percentage in leadership positions is few (UNwomen.org). For that, in this paper, our concern is to highlight women's empowerment in leadership positions. Several studies have shown that women leaders are more effective in business organizations. Time highlights to adopt a transformative change in organizational leadership (Lenka and Kar, 2021). Women have unique skills, abilities, and capabilities, including a positive outlook, a social conscience, the ability to spot chances and take risks, as well as intrinsic managerial abilities as a homemaker. These abilities assist them in making decisions for long-term goals that tangentially advance Sustainable Development Goals. They're caring nature helps them to make decisions for the long term, perspectives targeting the benefit of organizations, employees, society, and the environment where they work. It is assumed that balancing the three Ps (people, planet, profit) involves a decision-making process aimed at selecting value-creating activities. Numerous organizations realized it after being made mystified by public responses to those issues that they had not previously considered to be a part of their corporate responsibility. Activist groups of all stripes, both on the right and left, have become far more active and effective in applying public pressure on organizations. The time has come to enhance women's empowerment in leadership positions and involve them in the decision-making procedure. In the last four decades, a great deal of attention has been paid to exploring women's empowerment in business organizations, namely TATA, Infosys, and Wipro are some of them. Here we take an example from the TATA group to show the impact of business organizations towards women's empowerment and gender equality, TATA one of the leading organizations in India had a significant impact on gender equality when the Tata group launched the Tata Lead initiative with gender diversity as its first area of focus, Tata Motors took the goal very seriously. The company decided to create a brigade of 'Women in Blue' by enrolling, educating, and skilling girls from economically deprived areas. Many of these girls had never even held a screwdriver before. Enabling them to play their part in building world-class vehicles was greatly empowering. It was

the first step to helping them take charge of their own lives (women at work, 2022). Along with that, TATA Motors runs numerous initiatives to promote women's empowerment. It also invests in women-specific leadership programs such as the group's mentorship program called Tata Mentors. The number of women empowered in the TATA group is rising day by day. Over the last five years, the number of women working in Tata Starbucks has increased from 16 percent in FY14 to around 29 percent in FY19. It is a number that is poised to grow, given the range of initiatives in place to encourage women to join its ranks (women at work, 2022). Tata Starbucks, Tata Motors, Tata Power, and Tata Consultancy Services are revolutionizing work culture by promoting policies designed to empower women employees (women at work, 2022). It's a fact that *Advancing gender equality in the labour market continues to be a policy objective in many OECD countries* (Casey et al., 2011). Various non-profit organizations, as well as other committees and organizations, have established the notion of women empowerment, enhancing women in leadership positions; still, the growth is slow. We need more strategies and policies to enhance women's empowerment and gender equality. It has several benefits; improved *gender equality would have a largely positive effect on GDP per capita and the employment of women* (Morais, 2017; Chen, 2004; Löfström, 2009; Morrison et al., 2007). Leaders from all fields should understand the significance of gender equality in the process of SDG and adopt such strategies and policies to minimize the gender inequality gap.

5. Conclusion

This paper analysis the significance of gender equality in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. They are not a one-way dimension; it requires multiple strategy and dimensions to hit the target. Gender equality is not a favorable way to achieve SDG but it somehow helps to fulfill the goals and sub-goals of SDG. For that, business organizations, including other fields like education, politics, and health, make some effort to achieve it. However, different studies in this area have shown that business organizations have a great impact to achieve gender equality and enhancing women's empowerment. Consequently, the time has come to take gender equality as an emergency change, directly hit the target of SDG5 along with reducing poverty, violence, child death ratio, forced marriages, etc. empowered women are able to make the right decisions for their families, society and the ecosystem where they work and where they live. In the concluding part, we concede that time requires more women in leadership and decision-making procedure to achieve SDG. In-depth research and surveys are undoubtedly required to support the contribution of gender equality to sustainable development.

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