Underlying Drivers and Causes of Gender Inequality: Analytical Essay

Gender equality is a fundamental human right which in Fraser's (2013) words requires the realization of all human rights that includes livelihoods, integrity, dignity, security and rights to food, water and sanitation.

The sustainability and gender nexus can be understood by acknowledging the positive impacts of women on sustainable development and the slow progress on sustainable development restraints gender equality. (OECD, 2019)

Lisa Segnestam, (2018) states that in our societies, inequalities in resources, rights and responsibilities has designed power relations in a way that benefit some and discriminates others. This patterns is associated with impacts of pollution, capacities to respond climate change, management of resources, access to sanitation systems etc. on Equal societies have the potential to acquire healthier environment by increasing people's capacities to employ sustainable practices. Over-exploitation of natural resources, threatening the integrity of ecosystems, loss of key habitats and biodiversity, and pollution of land, seas and the atmosphere are the key trends of today's world as humans are the fundamental drivers of earth system processes. Patterns of production, consumption and distribution are heading in profoundly unsustainable directions.

Human unsustainable interactions with the environment are producing devastating effects in the form of droughts, floods and devastated urban and rural landscapes and livelihood. These unsustainable interactions not only add and exacerbate inequalities and poverty particularly in the south of the world with highest population density that directly dependents on natural resources for their well-being(Unmüßig et al. 2012), but also poses great threats for our future generations. Additionally, these unsustainable patterns intensify gender inequality.

The underlying drivers and causes of gender inequality and unsustainability are profoundly interlocked. Leach. M., et.al., (2014) argues that Unsustainability and gender inequality are produced and inherited by political-economic relations in capitalism that support peculiar types of neo-liberal, market-led growth which involves concentration of capital, privatization and production geared to short-term profits. These market led models are unsustainable socially, ecologically and economically as they rely on over-exploitation of natural resources, climate change and polluting oceans and lands to seek and secure short term profits which ultimately undermines the conditions for future progress and perpetuate gender inequality.

Although women have various employment opportunities in today's globalized world but many of these have provided and reproduced patterns of segregation and discrimination. Gender inequality is a constitutive element of capitalist markets as they see women as unpaid caregivers and the work undertaken by them is believed to be an extension of their traditional gender roles: in domestic service, labor-intensive agricultural work and low-end retail jobs which are characterized by instability, poor working conditions and low wages. Their work is consistently undervalued and ignored and consequently, women remain invisible within the economic system and considered secondary earners within their households. (Seguino and

Grown 2006, Braunstein and Houston, 2015)

Women’s obligations to accomplish these roles not only limits their choices, capabilities and paid employment opportunities but also puts stress and burden on them by compromising their dignity, status and rights. So this development model is socially and economically unsustainable as it over-exploits human capital and erodes the values of social security and care. (Razavi , 2006)

In ecological terms, the repercussions of environmental change are also felt in gendered ways which exacerbates inequality in the society. Women are the most affected entities of the society in case of disasters (Neymayer and Pluemper 2007) as they are at the forefront to face the effects of pollution, climate change and over-exploitation of natural resources. Poorer women that depends on natural resources for their food and livelihoods, becomes marginalized when these resources are exploited, grabbed and privatized for commercial investment. The scarcity of the resources forces them to sustain livelihoods under more strained conditions which consequently undermines their health, dignity, status and rights.

Another aspect of gender inequality and unsustainability is the rise of militarism in the world. Increase in defense spending undermines environmental and social investments associated with improved gender equality in various countries as WILPF-UK et al. (2019: 5) argues that “excessive global military spending feeds into a vicious cycle of societal instability, creating an unsuitable environment to pursue gender equality”. Militarism increases gender inequality by perpetuating violence, damages women’s dignity, bodily integrity and their rights.

Leach. M., et.al., (2014) argues that linking gender equality to sustainability is important for many reasons. Firstly, it is ethically and morally imperative as establishing equitable gender relations that support the capabilities, dignity and human rights of women is a fundamental requirement of sustainable world. Secondly, all the economic, environmental and social shocks must be addressed in order to avoid women becoming their victims as these stresses undermines their rights and women's crucial roles in sustaining their communities and families. Thirdly, it is important to build women's agency and capabilities to establish better synergies between gender equality and sustainability. (UN WOMEN 2014)

Due attention to gender relations and differences not just provide ways to address economical, social and environmental challenges and opportunities to pursue sustainable development but also highlights ways that women can be powerful agents to improve resource productivity and efficiency and to enhance ecosystems' sustainable use and conservation as sustainability and gender equality reinforce each other in powerful ways.(Agarwal 2002, Buckingham-Hatfield 2002, UNDP 2012, Johnsson-Latham 2007)

Filling the gap between sustainability and gender equality requires to acknowledge women as key actors on the way to sustainability and green transformation. Their capabilities, knowledge, bodily integrity and rights must be recognized and respected and they should have decision-making power and control over resources.

Conclusion:

It is possible to move environmentally, socially and economically in sustainable directions and

pathways which emphasizes on social justice, inclusivity and sustainability instead of focusing on growth and profit. Women undeniably plays a central role to pursue these sustainable pathways. Their agency, knowledge and actions are crucial to find and build economically, socially and ecologically sustainable ways. whether it comes to adapt to climate change, sustainable food production and to manage local ecologies and conserving biodiversity, water and soils.

In this perspective gender equality and sustainability are integral to each other and now the challenge is to identify and support alternative sustainable development pathways that support gender equality and women’s rights, voice and bodily integrity.