

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
Geneva, Switzerland

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

No. 2012.1

January 2012

**EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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UNITED NATIONS

The UNECE series of Discussion Papers is intended to make available to a wider audience papers on matters of topical interest that have been prepared by the staff of the secretariat or commissioned by the secretariat from external experts. The purpose of the Discussion Papers is to contribute to the analysis and discussion of economic developments and policies in the UNECE region. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the secretariat or of the member governments of the UNECE.

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Empowering women for sustainable development

Lisa Warth and Malinka Koparanova¹

“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”

(Principle 20, Rio Declaration)

“There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between women and men - equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities – is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes” (OSAGI 2001)

I. Introduction

Women, who make up half of the world’s population, have benefited more than men from the progress in economic and social development in the last three decades. Nevertheless they continue to be overrepresented among the world’s most vulnerable groups, as access to resources and power remains highly skewed towards men. Gender equality is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. By providing the same opportunities to women and men, including in decision-making in all kinds of activities, a sustainable path of development can be achieved to ensure that women’s and men’s interests are both taken into account in the allocation of resources.

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made important provisions for the recognition of women’s contributions and their full participation in sustainable development. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (quoted at the outset of this paper) and Chapter 24 entitled “Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development” of Agenda 21² make commitments to strengthening the position of women.³

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). An earlier version of this paper was prepared as a background document for a Roundtable Discussion on *Empowering women for sustainable development in the UNECE region* at the Sixty-fourth Session of the United Nation’s Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on 30 March 2011 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. We thank Claudia Trentini and Robert Shelburne for comments on earlier drafts.

² Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The full text is available online: <http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/>.

³ For more details, see E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/6/Add.1.

Sustainable development is “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.⁴ It therefore encapsulates the needs of both women and men. Intra-generational equity cannot be achieved without addressing the gender relations which underlie prevailing inequity. Nor can inter-generational equity be obtained, or responsibility to pass on a more equitable world to future generations be met, if inequalities continue to be perpetuated. Gender disparity is among the most pervasive forms of inequality in the world⁵ and without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved.

This paper focuses on women’s empowerment as a key process in reaching gender equality and, through that, sustainable development. The next section discusses the concepts of women’s empowerment and sustainable development and shows how both are inter-linked through the lens of intra and inter-generational justice. The remainder of the paper is then dedicated to the question of what needs to be done, and is being done, for women’s empowerment, both through building an enabling policy environment and through enhancing women’s capacity as active agents of change for sustainable development in the UNECE region.

II. What are women’s empowerment and sustainable development and how do they link?

What is women’s empowerment?

Empowerment can be defined as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important” (Page and Czuba, 1999).

The discussion about women’s empowerment in this paper is held against the backdrop of women’s continued disadvantage compared to men. This disadvantage is apparent in the different spheres of economic, socio-cultural and political life in all societies in the UNECE region. Empowerment in this context means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. As such, it can be conceptualized as an important process in reaching gender equality.

Gender equality is understood to mean that the “rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female”.⁶ What is expected of a man or a woman, a girl or a boy, differs depending on the socio-cultural context in which they live. Gender roles are learnt by each person through socialization processes. In other words: what he or she learns from others through the social interactions they have with their families, peers and society at large. This means that gender roles and gender role expectations are not fixed and can change over time in the same way that they differ across different societies.

On a larger scale, gender role expectations are institutionalized through legislation, education, political and economic systems, culture and traditions. These institutions

⁴ Sustainable development as defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development’s report “Our Common Future” (1987).

⁵ UNDP (2005), *Human Development Report*, p. 61.

⁶ OSAGI (2001), factsheet on “Important Concepts underlying Gender Mainstreaming”, available online: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf>.

structure social and cultural life and create *gendered* norms and practices. The gendered division of labour in everyday life is an example: women continue to play a dominant role in providing unpaid care to family members and taking care of domestic chores but they play a subordinate role in political and economic life. As women dedicate more time to unpaid activities, they are often dependent on men's income and less protected through financial savings, pension entitlements and property in their name. This means that women are at greater risk of poverty and have fewer opportunities in the labour market. The general understanding is therefore that women need to be "empowered" in order to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field between women and men before gender equality can be reached and maintained.

But what does it mean for a woman to be empowered? According to the United Nations Population Fund⁷ an empowered woman has a sense of self worth. She can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and she has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally (UNDP, 2008).

What is sustainable development?⁸

In the late 1980s the report *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development defined the concept "sustainable development" as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".⁹ While aiming to maximize the well-being of today's generation, it is important to take a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences of our actions for our children, their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the resources they will require for their own well-being are not depleted, and that the natural environment into which they will be born will not be polluted or destroyed.

Sustainable development is conceptualized as resting on three inter-related pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. A fourth pillar – the preservation of cultural diversity has been proposed.¹⁰ This conceptual categorization can lead to treating these areas in isolation without accounting for a whole range of channels through which these pillars reinforce each other and bring about sustainable development. Instead, by taking an integrated and holistic approach to socio-culturally responsible, environmentally-friendly economic development, sustainable development can be revealed as a multifaceted and dynamic process. As noted in a recent report by the Secretary General, "the goal, and indeed the ultimate test, of sustainable development is the convergence among the three trajectories of economic growth, social development and environmental protection" (A/CONF.216/PC/2, para. 22).

In this spirit it is important to acknowledge that the promotion of gender equality also requires a cross-cutting and integrative approach. It is important not to conceptualize women's empowerment and gender equality as a question of social development alone,

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/popin/unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwemp.gdl.html>.

⁸ For a more detailed conceptual discussion of sustainable development, refer to UNECE (2009) *Measuring Sustainable Development*, pp.18-24.

⁹ A/42/27, *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, see <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm#IV>.

¹⁰ The *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) states that cultural diversity is key to sustainable human development.

but as a cross-cutting issue in economic and socio-cultural development and environmental protection.

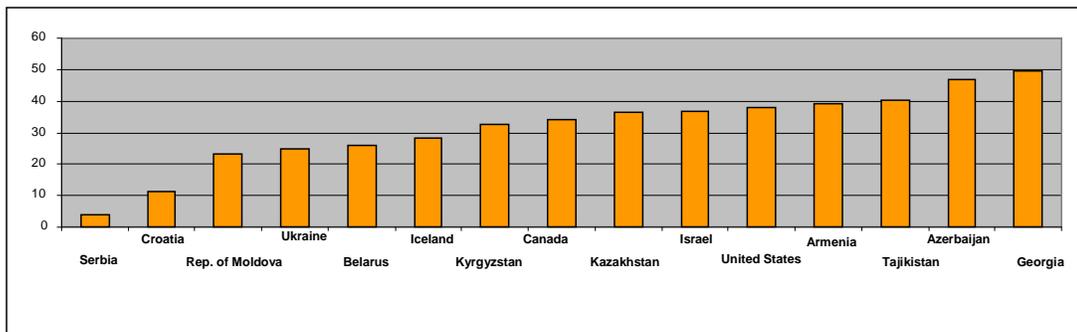
What are the cross-cutting gender dimensions of sustainable development?

Gender dimensions of sustainable development can be characterized by the allocation of resources between women and men, on the one hand, and, on the other, by how these resources are spread over time and generations. This section addresses both of these aspects: intra-generational justice – how resources are distributed among women and men; and inter-generational justice – whether resources are equitably distributed between present and future generations from a gender perspective. One objective of sustainable development is to satisfy the needs of the present. It calls for a more equitable distribution of resources among those living today where resources are unequally distributed. At the same time sustainable development requires a strategic perspective to account for what women and men are leaving for the next generation. This section therefore looks at these two dimensions of sustainable development through a gender lens.

Gender and intra-generational justice

Income is unequally distributed between women and men. The monthly Gender Pay Gap¹¹ in the UNECE region, which refers to the difference between men’s and women’s monthly earnings from employment, ranges from less than five per cent in Serbia to over 40 per cent in some countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Gender pay gap in selected countries, 2008 or latest available year (per cent)

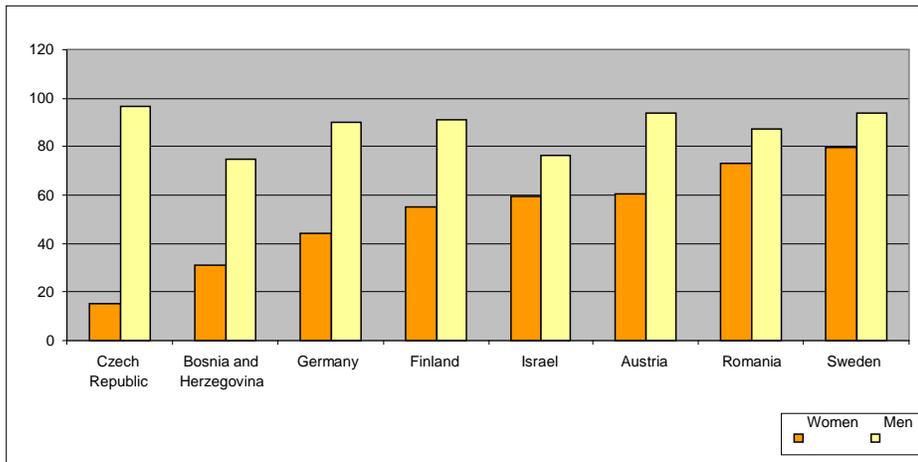


Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database (Gender Pay Gap as difference in monthly earnings)

As women take on the primary responsibility for the unpaid care of children and the elderly and for unpaid domestic labour, fewer women than men are in paid employment. Figure 2 illustrates the gender gap in employment for parents in a selection of UNECE member States. While there is considerable regional variation, women are always more likely than men to leave employment to take care of their child.

¹¹ The monthly Gender Pay Gap refers to the difference between men’s and women’s monthly earnings from employment, shown as a percentage of men’s average monthly earnings. The monthly as opposed to hourly GPG captures gender differences in working time as well as differences in hourly pay.

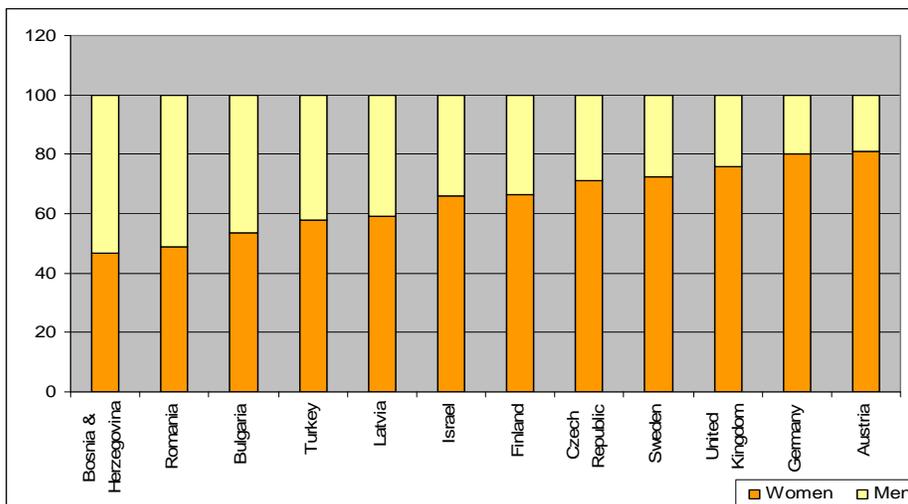
Figure 2: Employment rate of persons aged 25-54 with a child under three (2008)



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database

Women spend fewer hours in paid employment than men. Many women work part-time to reconcile their employment and family responsibilities (see Figure 3). This negatively affects their income and often their career prospects.

Figure 3: Gender composition of part-time workers (2009)



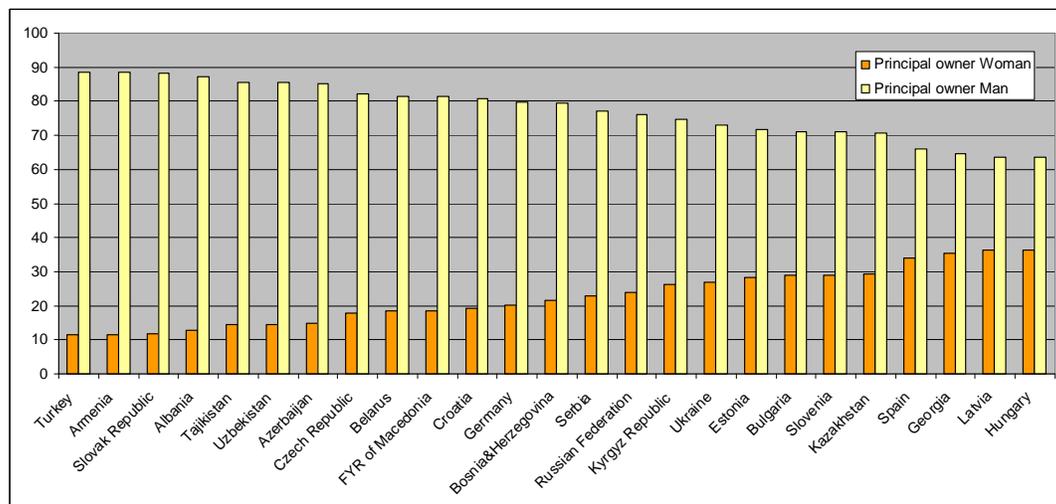
Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database.

Due to the discrepancy in earnings, women accumulate less income than men over their lifetime. Their lower earnings increase their vulnerability to poverty, not only during their working lives but also in old age, and increase their economic dependence on a male breadwinner or state welfare.

The income gap has implications for women who are less likely to obtain financial loans from banks. This reduces their opportunities to set up their own businesses to gain

economic independence. Women are less likely than men to be business owners as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Gender composition of firm ownership (2005)



Source: World Bank Enterprise Surveys¹².

Time-use surveys repeatedly show that women have less leisure time than men. When returning home from work they start their “second shift” at home. Many working women, in addition to being financially disadvantaged compared to men, also bear the effects of “time poverty” as responsibilities in the home and family life are unequally shared.

Gender and inter-generational justice

Inter-generational justice in the context of sustainable development refers to the obligation to ensure that future generations will have the resources to meet their own needs. Most emphasis has been placed on the depletion and degradation of natural resources caused by current production and consumption patterns. Inter-generational justice refers to the need to act responsibly now, and together.

Women’s advocacy groups have drawn attention to the important role that women are playing as natural resource managers and agents of change. It is important to recognize this role and to draw on women’s commitment and expertise in shaping strategies and decisions.

This not only refers to the important challenges faced with regard to protecting our natural environment. It also refers to the question of state debts which are accumulating and are being passed on to future generations; it refers to the responsibility of creating sustainable social protection systems in the ageing societies of our region. How can the well-being of the elderly be ensured without overburdening future generations who, in the context of demographic change, have to shoulder the costs of growing numbers of pensioners, and ensure the medical, emotional and physical care of elderly and frail relatives while becoming themselves increasingly fewer in number? If the gendered division of labour does not change, women are likely to bear the bulk of this challenge

¹² The survey asked whether the principal owner (or one of the principal owners) is female

both by having to work in paid employment to contribute to the financial costs and through increased unpaid work in the home.

Women's contribution to sustainable development, and their knowledge and skills, must be recognized. Women have a strong role in educating and socializing their children, including teaching them care and responsibility with regard to the use and protection of natural resources.

Today, women are still underrepresented among those who take the decisions that will impact future generations. Achieving both intra-generational and inter-generational justice is a goal towards which there is joint responsibility between both women and men.

In the UNECE region, member countries have come a long way in institutionalizing legal equality between women and men over the past 30 years. These efforts have been encouraged by the international community through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. While the legal framework for (formal) gender equality has been established in most areas across the region, major obstacles in reaching *de facto* equality in everyday life remain. Women earn less, own less and have decision-making power in society than men.

Why is a gender-sensitive approach to sustainable development needed? Because sustainable development cannot be achieved without a more equitable distribution of resources today and tomorrow: prevailing inequalities are deeply gendered. Understanding this and acting upon it is a key condition to achieving sustainable development.

Taking women's needs, concerns and their knowledge and skills into account will ensure a better understanding of the dynamics in society which create and perpetuate gender inequality and enable policymakers and other agents of change, including employers and civil society organizations, to develop appropriate policy responses and actions. Equal participation in decision-making and a balanced involvement of both men and women at all levels of implementation will ensure that women and men take equal responsibility for today's and future generations.

How can women be empowered in the context of sustainable development?

The remainder of this paper looks at the question of what concretely needs to be done, and is being done, for women's empowerment, both through building an enabling policy environment and through enhancing women's capacity as active agents of change for sustainable development.

III. Empowering women for sustainable development

Women's empowerment is a process. The discussion in this section is structured along four steps in this process. Firstly, the nature of the problem is identified. This means that the prevailing gender gaps where women continue to be at a disadvantage are identified and recognized as important. In this process it is important to consult women themselves to better understand their needs and concerns. Secondly, on the basis of this evidence-based analysis, key steps to create a safe, just and enabling environment are undertaken

through both targeted policies and gender mainstreaming. Thirdly, to contribute to sustainable development, women need to be agents of change and therefore building their skills and capacities is crucial. Finally, women at all levels of activity and decision-making need to be involved: women's full and equal participation is essential.

The selection of examples referred to in this section is of course not exhaustive. Sustainable development encompasses socio-cultural, economic and environmental aspects and thus covers an enormously wide domain. So far gender issues have been primarily dealt with as a social issue. This is reflected in the areas of poverty reduction, education and health care in the Millennium Development Goals. An effort is therefore made in this paper to highlight examples referring to the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Acknowledge existing inequalities: identify and recognize the gender gaps

What exactly is the situation of women compared to men? Are women really at a disadvantage, or is gender parity already reached? The collection and analysis of data which is disaggregated by sex makes it possible not only to identify the existence and size of "gender gaps"¹³ and to inform policies and programmes, but also to monitor policy effects and to evaluate our progress towards gender equality. By identifying the areas in which women continue to be disadvantaged, it is possible to recognize where empowering measures are most needed.¹⁴

Gender statistics

The Inter-Parliamentary Union collects sex-disaggregated data on the representation of women and men in parliaments worldwide in order to monitor the gender balance in political decision-making in the region and developments over time. In the UNECE region, women's representation in the national parliaments has increased over the past decade from 16.2 per cent in December 2000 to 22.2 per cent in December 2010: a positive development. However, with only one woman in five members of parliament, women are strongly underrepresented in political decision-making.¹⁵

With regard to executive political power, currently only six heads of Government in the region are women.¹⁶ The Council of Europe recently surveyed the gender balance in political and public decision-making in the region,¹⁷ and found a strong gender imbalance with regard to women's representation among government ministers. In 2008, 31 of UNECE member States reported that an average of one in four ministers (24.4 per cent) were women.

¹³ Gender gaps refers to the differences between women and men, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural or economic attainments and attitudes (<http://dictionary.reference.com>).

¹⁴ The Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective H3) called for the generation and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

¹⁵ Figures refer to women's representation in the lower or single houses of parliament. The figures are published on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's website: www.ipu.org.

¹⁶ In Denmark, Germany, San Marino, Slovakia and Switzerland (January 2012).

¹⁷ Council of Europe (CDEG (2009) 17 prov), *Parity Democracy: A far cry from reality*. Figures refer to an average based on 31 UNECE member States. For details, refer to Table 12 on page 27 of the report, which is available online: http://www.coe.int/t/dc/files/events/2010_journee_femme/Rapport_en.pdf.

UNECE assists member countries in the production and use of sex-disaggregated data by providing training materials, capacity-building workshops for national statistical offices, the development of survey modules and work on gender-sensitive indicators. In collaboration with the World Bank Institute, UNECE has recently produced a number of online training videos¹⁸ and has provided training to national statistical offices in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The recently published manual *Developing Gender Statistics: A practical tool* aims to guide statistical institutes in the production and use of gender statistics.¹⁹

UNECE further provides gender-sensitive data on demographic and social developments and the factors that influence these developments through the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP).²⁰ It explores the relationships between children and parents (generations) and between partners (gender). The Programme aims to detect, analyse and explain the reasons for current demographic developments, including those behind the current low and very low fertility levels.

Most progress in identifying gender gaps has arguably been achieved with respect to political and social and economic indicators in education, health, labour market participation and pay gaps. Data on these indicators is collected by UNECE and is accessible via the Gender Statistics Database on the UNECE website.²¹ It provides comparative data for the region on socio-economic and demographic indicators.²² Comparatively little, however, is known about gender differences in relation to environmental indicators.

Gender differences on environmental indicators

Currently only limited amounts of sex-disaggregated environment statistics are available, which makes it difficult to gauge gender differences when it comes to the management of natural resources and the protection of the environment. “Today it would still be an exception to see an environment indicator disaggregated by sex”, notes the Central Statistics Office of Ireland in a paper on Gender and Environment.²³ The issue of “Environment and Climate Change from a Gender Perspective” was discussed as an emerging issue at the last Session on Gender Statistics of the Conference on European Statisticians in April 2010.²⁴

Gender differences in attitudes and behaviours tend to be explored with respect to general attitudes to climate change and personal behaviours such as purchases and consumption patterns, recycling, the use of resources such as energy and water, and the choice of environmentally-friendly transports. A special Eurobarometer survey on attitudes towards climate change in 2009²⁵ found that women more often than men reported to have undertaken personal actions such as recycling, saving water and energy at home and using

¹⁸ The video training clips can be accessed online: <http://www.unece.org/stats/video>.

¹⁹ The manual is available for download: <http://www.unece.org/stats/publ.htm>.

²⁰ For more information on GGP: http://www.unece.org/pau/_docs/ggp/GGP_2008_Brochure_e.pdf.

²¹ Access the gender statistics database online: <http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/>.

²² The UNECE Gender Statistics Database provides data in the areas of population, fertility, families and households, work and the economy, education, public life and decision-making, health and mortality, crime and violence, science, information and communication technology, and work-life balance.

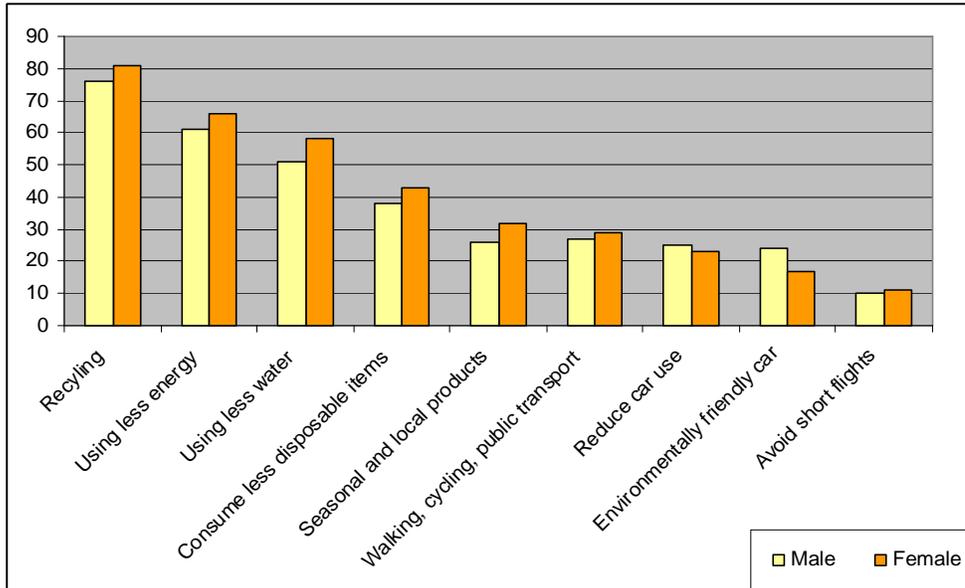
²³ Central Statistics Office of Ireland: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.30/2010/9.e.pdf>.

²⁴ Papers and presentations are available for download from the UNECE website: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.04.gender.htm>.

²⁵ Special Eurobarometer 322/Wave 72.1 – European’s attitudes towards climate change.

environmentally-friendly transports (Figure 5). The OECD also found that “men generally tend to perform energy saving activities less often than women” (OECD, 2011: 67).

Figure 5: Personal actions to prevent climate change



Source: Special Eurobarometer 322/Wave 72.1.

More systematic data collection on gender-sensitive environmental indicators could provide useful information on people’s attitudes and actions in their use of natural resources and protecting the environment such as reducing waste and CO₂ emissions. This knowledge could help policymakers in targeting information or financial incentives.²⁶ Steps in this direction are being taken. In the recommendations for future actions by the Conference of European Statisticians, it was proposed to form a taskforce to develop a conceptual framework for Environment and Gender Statistics (ECE/CES/2010/52).

Gender gaps in the collective management of natural resources

Women’s participation in sectors managing natural resources (such as energy, water and forestry) is lower than men’s. In order to better understand the gender structures in the forestry sector, the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training requested a Team of Specialists to study the involvement of women in the forestry sector. They found that “although women are significant users of forest products, they rarely have input into forestry decision-making, either at the macro or even at the micro-level”. Statistics available on the forestry sector labour force indicate that “men dominate the forestry sector workforce in most countries and usually earn more than their equally qualified female counterparts” (FAO 2006: 157).

²⁶ Central Statistics Office Ireland (2010).

Gendered impacts of environmental degradation and climate change

Women contribute to sustainable development but they are also affected by the implications of environmental degradation and the negative effects of climate change (Dankelman, 2010). In general, it is argued that women who predominate among the world's poor are at greater risk of environmental challenges as they often lack the necessary means to successfully adapt and protect themselves.

In the UNECE region, the shrinking of the Aral Sea in Central Asia is a dramatic example of environmental damage where the use of water for irrigation of cotton monocultures and the use of chemicals in insecticides, pesticides, herbicides and defoliants over the past 30 years has left a legacy of ecological, economic and social insecurity. Environmental pollution has a negative health impact for the local populations who are exposed to high levels of toxins in the drinking water.²⁷ Women and children are particularly affected. Levels of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality have been reported to be significantly higher in the Aral Sea Region (Karakalpakstan and Kzyl-Orda) than in other parts of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and a very high proportion of women suffer from anemia (Ataniyazova 2003).

The Research Centre for Environment and Health in Belgium has been taking gender differences into account in screening the health effects of certain environmental substances. In this way, the bio-monitoring project has found that women are more sensitive to certain types of pollution. These results are an important information source for preventative measures to protect, for example, pregnant women.²⁸

Summing up, the identification and analysis of sex-disaggregated data in the economic, social and environmental realms is an important first step in recognizing existing gender gaps and gender differences. No one, however, is better placed to draw attention to, and enhance understanding of, the needs and concerns of women than women themselves.

Listen to the women: women's advocacy

Environmental and women's organizations, networks and alliances are playing an important role in identifying and addressing gender equality perspectives in environmental protection and sustainable development. Many UNECE member States are in dialogue with civil society organizations whose goal is to integrate gender equality objectives with those of environmental protection and sustainable development. Dedicated awareness-raising on the interface between gender equality, environmental protection and sustainability can enhance the integration of gender perspectives in sustainable development debates and can contribute to ultimately increasing women's participation in decision-making. Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) and the Women and Environment Organization (WEDO) are examples of organizations at the regional and global level. Examples of networks and alliances active in this area include the Women's Environmental Network (genanet), Women for Climate Justice

²⁷ O.A. Ataniyazova (2003), "Health and Ecological Consequences of the Aral Sea Crisis", pp. 1-3.

²⁸ As reported by Belgium in response to the Beijing +15 questionnaire:
<http://live.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/documents/Beijing+15/Belgium.pdf>.

(GenderCC), the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) and the Gender and Water in Central Asia Network (GWANET) to name but a few.²⁹

UNECE provides a regional platform for policy dialogue which involves women's organizations. Women's non-governmental organizations actively participated in the discussions on remaining challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality at the Beijing+15 Regional Review Meeting on 2-3 November 2009. In September 2010, UNECE co-organized with the Regional Cooperation Council and the Government of Turkey the first Forum for Women Entrepreneurs in South-East Europe.³⁰ Fifty-nine women entrepreneurs, policymakers, representatives from Chambers of Commerce and regional organizations met in Istanbul to discuss what support is needed for women entrepreneurs in South-East Europe, ranging from improved access to training and finance to role models and networking opportunities. The Forum provided a space for dialogue and interaction among women entrepreneurs, women's business associations, policymakers, civil society and international organizations in South-East Europe in which participants could exchange information and network. In September 2011, a similar opportunity was provided by a policy seminar on Women's Entrepreneurship Development in Central Asia, organised by UNECE and UNDP in Geneva, at which women's business organisations, NGOs and policy makers discussed the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural areas³¹.

IV. Create an enabling environment

Women's empowerment requires an enabling and supportive environment. This includes removing the obstacles and barriers to equal participation and rewards for women. Creating an enabling environment encompasses action at all levels: relevant legal reforms and policy measures at the government and municipality levels, as well as initiatives and support by the private sector, civil society, family and friends.

The need for a gender-sensitive approach across all policy areas has been strongly advocated by the Beijing Platform for Action agreed by UN member States at the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995. UNECE, as all regional commissions, has a special role in assisting member States in monitoring the progress of advancing the situation of women across the twelve areas of concern highlighted by the Beijing Platform for Action.³² This includes the importance of creating strong institutions for gender equality in the region.³³

A dual approach of positive action and gender mainstreaming is most beneficial to creating an enabling environment for women. This refers first to dedicated policies and programmes which explicitly aim at improving women's situations, and second, to taking

²⁹ There are many more organizations and networks active in the UNECE region which cannot all be named here.

³⁰ The First Forum for South-East European Women Entrepreneurs was organized under the auspice of the Turkish Chairman in the Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process. It was organized by the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Development Administration of Turkey (KOSGEB), the Regional Cooperation Council and UNECE.

³¹ More information on the policy seminar is available online: <http://www.unece.org/gender/policyseminar>

³² For the full text and more information see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>.

³³ See UNECE (2010) *National Mechanisms for Gender Equality* for an analysis of the development of national mechanisms for women's empowerment and gender equality in the UNECE region over the past 15 years. Two regional studies are available for download on www.unece.org/gender.

a gender-sensitive approach across all policies and programmes which do not have women's empowerment as their primary purpose.

A safe and healthy environment for women

The most basic and important premise for women's empowerment is peace and the absence of violence, including domestic violence.

Infrastructure developments in transportation as well as urban planning, which takes into account the safety and mobility needs of women, are important factors enabling women to move around freely. Safe and affordable transport enables women to fully participate in economic activities as well as in community life and plays an important role in broadening access to health and education opportunities.³⁴ Women are less likely than men to have a driving licence and own a car.³⁵ UNECE has noted a worrying price development in transport services, which could disproportionately affect women.³⁶ Given their lower car use, access to affordable public transport is particularly important to them.

A safe environment also means not being exposed to health risks created through environmental degradation such as air and water pollution. UNECE works to safeguard the environment and human health, working with member countries to reduce pollution in order to minimize environmental damage. Five environmental treaties have been negotiated to this effect and UNECE helps monitor their implementation.³⁷

A life course approach to social security and support

Women are the primary care givers for children, disabled and elderly family members. This unpaid "labour of love" puts women at a disadvantage over the course of their lifetimes. They spend fewer hours in paid employment than men and often have interrupted employment records due to years taken out of the labour force to care for young children. This penalizes them in old age as they will have accrued fewer years of pension contributions. Since women's life expectancies are higher than men's in the UNECE region (see Figure 6) they spend more years depending on social security than men, often needing long-term care which puts them at additional risk of old age poverty.

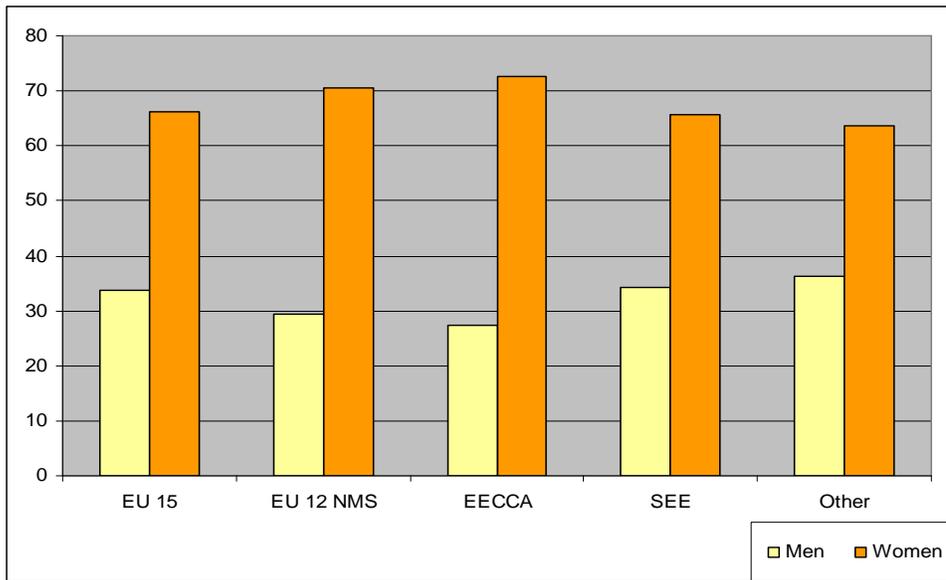
³⁴ For more information on gender and transport, visit http://www.unece.org/trans/theme_gender.html.

³⁵ K. Lucas (2003), "Transport and Social Exclusion: A G7 Comparison Study", Transport Studies Group at the University of Westminster.

³⁶ UNECE (2011), "Transport for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region".

³⁷ For more information on UNECE's work on environment and the conventions, see <http://www.unece.org/env/welcome.html>.

Figure 6: Gender gap among the population over 80 years of age, by region³⁸ (2007)



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database.

Gender mainstreaming in an ageing society is one of the 10 commitments of the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which was concluded in 2002.³⁹ It sets the objectives of reaching full gender equality; realizing full equality between women and men in their contribution to the economy; ensuring equal access to social protection and social security systems; and promoting shared responsibilities of women and men within their families (Commitment 8). Member States have reported on the implementation of the RIS in 2011. The synthesis of these reports will flow into the discussions of a Ministerial Conference on Ageing, which will mark 10 years of MIPAA and RIS and which will take place in Vienna, Austria, in September 2012.

Gender and education for sustainable development

One cannot underestimate the importance of a gender-sensitive education which can challenge gender stereotypes and promote more equitable relations between women and men. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) “aims to help people to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future, and to act upon these decisions”.⁴⁰

Gender equality as a goal of socio-cultural development is firmly integrated in this vision. At the regional level, the UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development⁴¹

³⁸ The regions in Figure 6 are composed of the following countries: EU 15 – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom; EU 12 NMS – Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria; EECCA – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan; SEE – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, The FYI of Macedonia; Other – Canada, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland, United States. UNECE has 56 member States. For a full list of member States, see http://www.unece.org/oes/nutshell/member_States_representatives.htm.

³⁹ See http://www.unece.org/pau/_docs/ece/2002/ECE_AC23_2002_2_Rev6_e.pdf

⁴⁰ UNESCO website: <http://www.unesco.org/en/esd/>.

⁴¹ CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1.

sets out the aim to equip people with knowledge and skills to act with concern for gender equity and stresses the importance of gender equity for sustainable development.⁴²

In addition to making gender equality a subject of teaching, we need to take gender differences in learning and access to education into account when devising strategies for ESD. Educational activities need to be relevant to girls and boys, women and men. Eurobarometer data in 2009 indicated that women in Europe felt less informed about the causes and consequences of climate change than men, and less certain as to what can be done about it.⁴³ Are current climate change discussions in Europe more accessible and relevant to men than to women? Women on the other hand demonstrated personal actions in their consumption behaviours to reduce their carbon footprint and to save natural resources more often than men. Better knowledge on the gender differences in attitudes and behaviour towards natural resources through research and relevant statistical data could enable policymakers to shape educational activities accordingly, to adequately mainstream gender “throughout educational planning – from infrastructure planning to material development to pedagogical processes”.⁴⁴

In order to take gender issues into account in their daily work, policymakers need to be sensitized to gender dimensions in their policy fields. There are many examples of gender training in the UNECE region. In Lithuania, for example, the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for 2005-2009 covered the integration of a gender equality perspective in environmental protection. Between 2006 and 2009, gender equality training for environmental specialists were organized. A total of 82 specialists of the Ministry of Environment received gender equality trainings.⁴⁵

Building women’s capacity

Removing obstacles to women’s full involvement and participation in sustainable development is one side of the coin of women’s empowerment. The other side is to target women directly to enable them to get more involved. Training programmes which are tailored to the needs of women are an obvious tool. Capacity-building can be at the level of access to relevant information and knowledge, of concrete skills, and with respect to increasing the financial capacity necessary to implement certain actions.

Encourage women to seize opportunities in the “green economy”

The Women’s Bureau at the US Department of Labour is providing training and support for women to enable and encourage them to seize opportunities in the new green economy. Investments and new jobs in the green economy are predominantly directed at male-dominated professions which puts women at a disadvantage. The US Programme addresses this problem by encouraging women to enter these professions. If women seize the opportunities provided by the promotion of this sector and associated jobs, they will not only contribute their knowledge and skills to sustainable development, but will

⁴² UNECE strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, Paragraphs 6 and 15.

⁴³ Women were more likely to reply “don’t know” to questions relating to the causes of climate change, its impact on the European economy and ways of reducing greenhouse emissions (Special Eurobarometer 322).

⁴⁴ As called for by UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/en/education-for-sustainable-development/themes/gender-equality/>, accessed on 21 February 2011.

⁴⁵ Reported in the national response of Lithuania to the Beijing +15 Regional Review 2009 (<http://live.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/documents/Beijing+15/Lithuania.pdf>).

benefit themselves from sustainable development investments. The Women's Bureau hosted a series of teleconferences for workforce practitioners, designed to offer information and an exchange of ideas to better connect women with green jobs training and green employment. A new guide *Why Green is your Color: A Woman's Guide to a Sustainable Career* will provide women workers and workforce professionals with information on hiring needs and challenges, training and entrepreneurship opportunities, and in-demand and emerging jobs in green industries. National, state and local resources, including women's organizations and workforce practitioners, will be included in the curriculum.⁴⁶

Increase knowledge on sustainable energy and climate protection

Another example of capacity building in the region is a recent project by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF),⁴⁷ which built the capacity of 18 women and environmental NGOs in seven countries in Caucasus and Central Asia in the area of sustainable energy and climate protection. Concretely, participating NGOs received the knowledge needed for a local and regional transformation of the energy sectors, promoting energy saving and efficiency and the use of renewable energies. This included, for example, training on solar collectors. Training focused on the practical implementation of concrete projects, taking into account the social roles of women and men. It promoted the active involvement and empowerment of women, knowledge transfer and covered national and international legislation and processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Training on business support systems and use of information and communication technologies

UNECE attaches great importance to training women in entrepreneurial skills, including new technologies, to increase their opportunities in the market. To this end, UNECE has collaborated with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center and Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation since 2006 in providing biannual training workshops for professional women from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. The workshops cover support systems for women entrepreneurs and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Since the first jointly organized workshop in 2006 on Microcredit and other Support Systems for Women Entrepreneurs, over 250 women entrepreneurs from government institutions and SME support agencies, NGOs dealing with small business support and development, women's business associations, and academia have received training on ICTs and Support Systems for Women Entrepreneurs.

Facilitate access to financial resources

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is one of a number of institutions that are working to increase access to credit for women entrepreneurs in the UNECE region. In November 2009, a €50 million loan was granted to Turkey's Garanti

⁴⁶ Women's Bureau Website: <http://www.dol.gov/wb/media/Greenhome.htm>

⁴⁷ Project website for more information: <http://www.wecf.eu/english/about-wecf/issues-projects/projects/energy-capacity-BMU-08.php>.

Bank, which has a strong history of lending to female entrepreneurs and which committed, as part of the loan agreement, to promote access to loans for female entrepreneurs in rural areas outside Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir.⁴⁸

An enabling environment for women's advancement and increased capacity to contribute to sustainable development are important preconditions to women's full and equal participation.

Involve women – at all levels

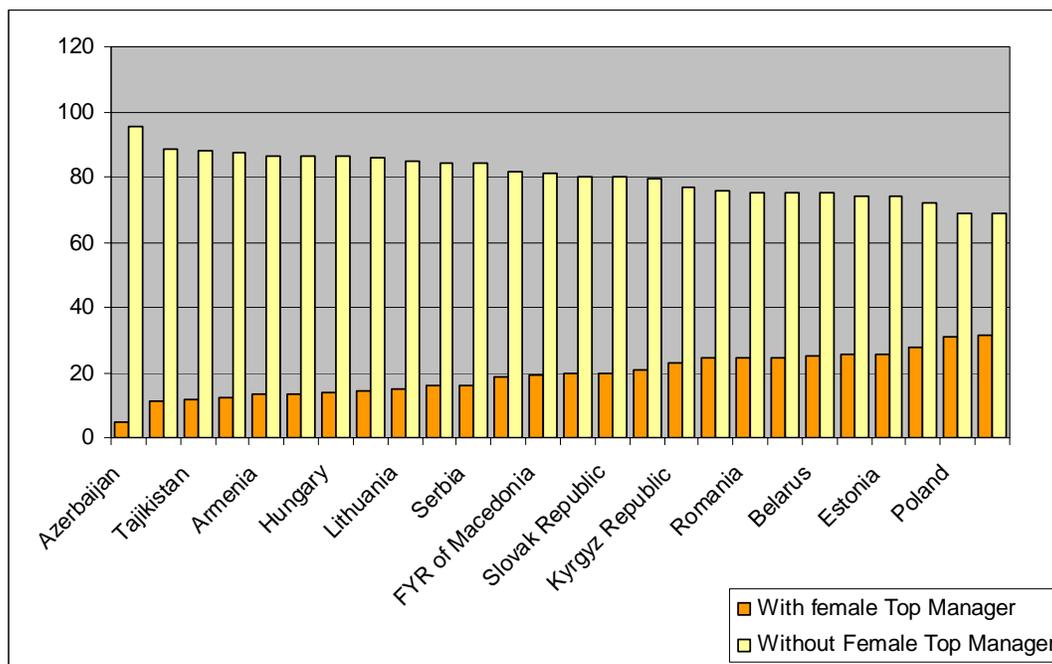
Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of women. Yet women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making wherever we look: what is being done to address the large gender gap in decision-making? In the scope of this paper we can only cover a small selection of initiatives. This section looks at women's involvement in decision-making at the global, regional and national levels, and addresses the role of the international community, regional organizations, national governments and civil society in redressing the gender gap.

Women continue to be underrepresented

Only six heads of Government in the UNECE region are women, and only around one in five parliamentarians. Women also form a minority in economic decision-making. In the 27 member States of the European Union (EU 27) there were no women among governors of the Central Banks in 2009 and the proportion of women among members of the decision-making bodies of the Central Banks was less than one in five (European Commission 2010:19). Women also form the minority on European corporate boards. In 2009, women constituted only three per cent of presidents/chairpersons of the highest decision-making bodies of the largest publicly quoted firms on the national stock exchange of the EU 27, and only one in ten members of the highest decision-making bodies of these firms were women (European Commission 2010: 22). In the UNECE region, women further form the minority among business owners and top managers as illustrated by Figure 7.

⁴⁸ Accessed on 27 February 2011:
<http://www.ebrd.com/russian/pages/about/principles/gender/empowerment.shtml>.

Figure 7: Percentage of firms with female top managers (2009 or latest available)



Source: World Bank Enterprise Surveys.

Women are underrepresented among those who take decisions regarding environmental protection. Only about one in five environment ministers in the UNECE region is a woman. Turning to the international community, we see that in the past 19 years the Commission on Sustainable Development, for example, was chaired 18 times by a man and only once by a woman. At present women account for only around 12-15 per cent of all Heads of Delegations at the UNFCCC and around 30 per cent of all party delegates, as reported by the Women’s Environment & Development Organization.⁴⁹ The Adaptation Fund, which was set up to finance concrete projects and programmes in countries which are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change, currently has only one woman on its 16-member board, which is the principal governing and managing body of the fund. Of the 16 alternate board members, only four were women as of November 2010 (UNDP, 2010).

Increasing women’s participation in decision-making

In 2003, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making,⁵⁰ which covers the majority of UNECE member countries. This Recommendation defined balanced participation as a minimum representation of 40 per cent of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life. By 2008,

⁴⁹ “Strengthening Women’s Leadership at the UNFCCC: The Women’s Delegates Fund”, posted on www.wedo.org.

⁵⁰ Council of Europe Rec (2003) 3.

however, only three member States had reached the recommended minimum of 40 per cent of women in their national parliament.⁵¹

In a number of countries in the region, political parties have introduced quota systems to address this challenge.⁵² Poland for example introduced a mandatory minimum quota which sets the number of women that must stand in political elections at 35 per cent. Similarly, increasing numbers of countries in the region are introducing or are considering introducing quotas to increase women's participation in economic decision-making. Most prominently, Norway has achieved a gender balance of over 40 per cent on the boards of state-owned and privately-owned public limited companies following the introduction of legally-binding quotas. Spain and Denmark, and more recently Italy, have also introduced quota legislation.

In addition, many voluntary measures have been set in motion to increase women's access to decision-making positions. Germany, for example, is making efforts to improve the gender balance on environmental committees and bodies. The German Environment Ministry is using four-year equality plans with the aim of appointing and promoting women to top management positions. Annual mentoring projects for women are conducted each year to support this endeavour.⁵³

Mentoring initiatives have also been implemented in the economic realm. The Finnish Women's Enterprise Agency, for example, connects women starting a new business with experienced female entrepreneurs. During regular meetings, experienced mentors help the new entrepreneurs avoid some of the pitfalls of early business development and develop contacts that can benefit the new business (Economic Commission 2010: 41).

Women's involvement and participation in sustainable development processes

A recent global initiative to address the gender gap in participation and decision-making is the Women's Delegate Fund (WDF). It was set up in recognition of the need to increase women's access to and participation in climate change negotiations. It is a project by the Global Gender and Climate Alliance, implemented by UNDP and administered by the Women's Environment & Development Organization with the financial support of the Government of Finland. Since its start in 2009 the WDF has financed the participation of over 25 women in UNFCCC meetings.

Regional cooperation in the development of strategies and policy measures for sustainable development is necessary to address regional challenges which extend across national borders. The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (known as the Aarhus Convention) provides an important framework for the involvement of women and environmental NGOs in the negotiation and implementation of international agreements

⁵¹ Sweden (46%), Finland (41.5%) and the Netherlands (41.3%). See the Council of Europe Factsheet "Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making", which is available online: www.coe.int/equality.

⁵² According to a recent Council of Europe report, some political parties have introduced quota rules in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and The FYR of Macedonia (CDEG (2009) 17 prov, Table 4).

⁵³ Policy measure reported in Germany's response to the Beijing +15 questionnaire, which is available online at www.unece.org/gender.

by setting out minimum requirements for public participation in various categories of environmental decision-making.⁵⁴

An example at the regional level is the close involvement of Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) in activities supporting the implementation of the UNECE/WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health under the framework of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. Women in Europe for a Common Future are co-leading activities in the areas of small-scale water supplies and sanitation, and public awareness, access to information and public participation.

V. Looking forward: towards gender equality in sustainable development

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without a more equitable distribution of resources today and tomorrow. This paper has highlighted that prevailing inequalities are deeply gendered. Understanding this and making policy decisions towards reducing these inequalities is a key condition in “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns need to be approached in an integrated and holistic manner. From a gender perspective, it is particularly important not to consider gender equality as a socio-cultural issue alone but to give it due consideration in the economic and environmental realms as well – treating gender equality as a cross-cutting objective.

A more systematic data collection is needed both on sex-disaggregated economic and social indicators as well as on gender-sensitive environmental indicators in order to identify gender gaps, acknowledge inequalities and monitor them. Particular attention needs to be focused on sex-disaggregated data of environmental indicators and the efforts of international organizations at regional and global levels as well as of national institutions, need to be strengthened.

There is a relative knowledge and awareness gap with regard to gender and the environment. Gender relations in social and economic development are to date better explored in the UNECE region. In the absence of systematically collected data, women’s advocacy groups have been playing an important role in drawing attention to the gender dimension with respect to the national environment and climate change.

Empowering women is a process that encompasses both the creation of an enabling environment for women which is free of discrimination, and strengthening women’s ability to take control over their own lives and fully contribute to bringing about the needed changes in our societies. This process needs to be taken forward through joint action and commitment by all: governments, the corporate sector and civil society.

Equal participation in decision-making and a balanced involvement of both men and women in all policy areas and at all levels of implementation will ensure that women and men take equal responsibility for the equitable distribution of resources, over the course of people’s lives and between present and future generations.

Gender equality is a long-term project. Today’s generations of girls and young women in the UNECE region are growing up with more rights and opportunities than the

⁵⁴ For more information on the 1998 Aarhus Convention, visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html>.

generations of women preceding them and with greater power over their own lives. In many parts of the UNECE region their grandmothers saw the introduction of a woman's right to vote and stand for office within their lifetimes. The considerable gains enjoyed today are the result of sustained and joint efforts to effect change. In a long-term perspective of sustainable development it is important to continue to strengthen the foundations for sustainable and equitable well-being for both women and men in a healthy environment.

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