



THE FUTURE WOMEN WANT

A Vision of Sustainable
Development for All

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UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet meets with rural women of the Soulalyates ethnic group, who have been striving for inheritance and property rights in Morocco.

FOREWORD

Rio+20 provides an opportunity for leaders to strengthen the foundation laid 20 years ago at the 1992 Earth Summit to build a path towards a sustainable future.

Twenty years ago, UN Member States unanimously agreed that “women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”.

Twenty years later, we still have a long way to go to end discrimination and violence against women and to achieve equal rights, opportunities and participation. A new development paradigm should advance equality, human rights and environmental protection.

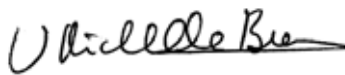
Every day, women manage household resources and make decisions with environmental impacts. To move forward, Rio+20 needs to encourage specific actions to advance women’s empowerment and gender equality and reduce women’s poverty and harmful health and environmental impacts. Any agreement must acknowledge women’s contributions to sustainable development.

UN Women was established in 2010 to make greater progress for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Our work—to advance women’s leadership, participation and economic opportunities; end violence against women and girls; increase women’s participation in peace-building; and support

gender-responsive budgets and plans—supports sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

For the sake of current and future generations, we must nurture and develop all of humankind’s collective intelligence and capacity. Given rising sea levels, increasing inequality and environmental decline, the full and equal participation and leadership of women is no longer an option. It is an urgent necessity if we are to achieve the transformational change needed at all levels and spheres of society for sustainable development.

I am proud to release this report highlighting the centrality of women’s rights, empowerment and gender equality to sustainable development, and pointing the way forward with recommendations to build the future women want.



Michelle Bachelet
Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Director, UN Women





MOVING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NO TIME TO WASTE

Since the first Rio Conference in 1992, the world has experienced economic, social and environmental crises with severe human costs for many of the world's most vulnerable, poor and disadvantaged people. Nearly two thirds of the services provided by nature to humankind are in decline worldwide and climate change poses unprecedented threats to humanity.

Spiking world food prices, first in 2008 and again in 2011, pushed millions of additional people into poverty. Food costs between 2010 and 2011 alone kept an estimated 49 million people in poverty and led to increased undernourishment.¹ Urban and female-headed households were particularly hard hit—women are disproportionately represented among the global poor. The food crisis remains a serious threat to the lives of millions, and entrenched gender roles mean that women often bear the brunt of the associated hardships as growers and processors of food, responsible for the nutrition of their family.

Four years after the 2008–2009 financial crisis, global economic recovery is still uncertain. Advanced economies are expected to grow at a little over 1 per cent in 2012; developing countries, which buoyed the global economy in the aftermath of the crisis, are expected to grow slower. Unemployment remains high in most developed countries, still well above pre-crisis levels, but in developing countries employment recovery has been stronger. The impacts of the recession, unemployment and slow economic growth on women and men differ due to gender norms and stereotypes that continue to perpetuate gender-based discrimination in many areas, including access to productive assets and justice.

The urgency to find a new global development framework is greater than ever. The dominant model of economic development has led to growing inequalities within and between countries and helped to generate social and

economic exclusion. A new gender-responsive global development framework must integrate environmental sustainability, inclusive growth, gender equality and social inclusion.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

In addition to strong action to protect the environment, sustainable development requires delivering on the fundamentals: international commitments to eradicate poverty, promote human rights and advance gender equality.

The 1945 Charter of the United Nations reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of every human, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small. It demonstrated determination to promote social progress and better standards of life with expanded freedoms.² Within this framework, gender equality advocates in civil society, governments and the UN system have advocated for the equal rights of women and girls in civil, economic, political, social and environmental issues.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a significant outcome of these efforts, committed all State Parties to take measures in the political, social, economic and cultural fields to guarantee women the full exercise and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. In its dialogues with government representatives, the CEDAW Committee has called on State Parties to include gender equality and women's empowerment as an overarching guiding principle in all areas, including the environment and climate change.³

In 1987, the Brundtland Commission report, 'Our Common Future', ushered in a new thinking on sustainable development, which it defined as development that "meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This definition laid the foundation for an

approach to sustainable development that highlights inter-generational responsibility and defines the three interlinked and mutually reinforcing dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

During the 1990s, the international community came together at a series of international conferences and agreed on global commitments in relation to sustainable development, financing for development, human rights, population issues, social development and gender equality and women's empowerment.

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (the Earth Summit), the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 laid out a global framework for addressing the challenges facing the global community in the three central dimensions of sustainable development.⁴

Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration stated that "women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development."⁵ In addition, Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 recommended that national governments develop strategies to "eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioural, social and economic obstacles to women's full participation in sustainable development and in public life".

Much of the progress made on the normative framework for sustainable development at the international level should be credited to the women's movement. Across the globe, women leaders have advocated for environmental issues, women's rights and the well-being of their communities.

Since the Earth Summit, work towards attaining sustainable development has increasingly integrated its economic, social and environmental dimensions, with a strong focus on poverty eradication. The 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation reviewed progress made since the Earth Summit and discussed ways to further advance Agenda 21 implementation. The Plan noted that poverty eradication is the greatest contemporary global challenge and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly in developing countries. The Plan also outlined areas in which work was required in order to advance gender equality, including promoting women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making at all levels, mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and strategies, eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and ensuring full and equal access to economic opportunities, credit, education, health care, land and agricultural resources.

BOX 1. 1992: Agenda 21 calls for global action for women

Chapter 24 of Agenda 21, Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development, contains references and recommendations on subjects including eliminating

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