WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL GIRLS AND WOMEN

Girls just want to have fun...damental human rights. When we examine our world through a gender equality lens, we can see that we have made many advances and we have come a long way in ensuring girls and women have the same opportunities as the boys and men in our world. However, we still have much work to do as many barriers for girls and women still exist today. This goal examines the ways women and girls are discriminated against in our world and how to put a stop to it. From ending violence and exploitation to empowering women, or protecting their mental, physical and sexual health, there are many areas to focus on if we are going to achieve this goal by 2030. Just like many of the other Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality is interconnected with the other goals —everyone’s actions and support make the difference in achieving gender equality.

TARGETS

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- Eliminate forms of violence and exploitation against women and girls in both public and private spheres.
- Eliminate harmful practices such as child or forced marriages and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through public services, social protection and shared responsibility.
- Ensure full and effective participation for women in leadership and decision-making.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

“Women’s status in society has become the standard by which humanity’s progress toward civility and peace can be measured.”

Mahnaz Afkhami
Founder and president of the Women’s Learning Partnership
THE BIG QUESTIONS

1 Where did it begin?

- This goal is rooted in our understanding of gender. It is important to understand that gender is the socially constructed and personally identified classification as either male, female or distinct from male and female such as people who are gender neutral or transgender. While sex is a biological label, gender is a social and cultural construct.

- Gender discrimination, or sexism, is the prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Gender discrimination can take on multiple forms, including stereotypes, sexist language, institutional sexism, 'glass ceilings', objectification, harassment and violence. These forms of discrimination can take place in our schools, our homes, our workplaces, our communities and our bodies.

- Social, economic and political discrimination against women has been fueled by misogyny, or the oppression of women beneath men. Harmful practices like female genital mutilation, honour killings, child marriages, unequal employment opportunities and pay, traditional gender roles, anti-abortion laws, violence, and abuse individually and collectively contribute to gender discrimination and inequality.

- Throughout history, feminism has become an important platform for the push for equal treatment of women in social, economic and political spaces. Feminism is a range of political, ideological and social movements that seek to define and advance the rights of women in the effort to achieve equality of the sexes. Feminist movements continue to campaign for women's right to vote, hold public office, earn fair wages, own property, receive education, have maternity leave and have equal rights in marriage. As actress Emma Watson said, “If you stand for equality, then you are a feminist.”

2 Why does this issue matter?

- Women deserve to fulfill their potential
  Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and therefore half of its potential. Gender equality is a fundamental human right. When we support women and girls, we are advancing other critical areas such as healthy societies, poverty reduction, quality education and well-being for all.

- The future is female
  Raising the age of marriage and investing in education for girls can result in a rate of return of $5 for every dollar invested. When we spend on programs that improve income-generating activities for women, the rate of return has been shown to be even higher at $7 for every dollar invested.
• **Violence and abuse are still a major problem**
  Thirty-five per cent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner violence. About 133 million girls and women have also experienced some form of female genital mutilation in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East where it most often occurs.

3 **Who and what are affected?**

• **Girls**
  In Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers that prevent them from entering primary and secondary school. Thirty-two million primary-age girls and 98 million secondary-age girls are missing out on school. Girls often face pressure to drop out of school in order to take care of the home and their family members, get married or bring in money for their family.

• **Women**
  Women in Northern Africa hold fewer than one in five paid jobs outside of the agricultural sector. Skills training, education and support for unpaid domestic labour are essential to economic, social and political empowerment. However, women are gaining more opportunities to hold positions of power. For example, 46 countries now have women in over 30 per cent of their seats of parliament. Despite this, it is critical to go beyond the numbers to manifest actual change in the policies and practices of government and state support of gender equality.

• **Transgender Women**
  Transgender women, or people who are assigned male sex at birth but identify as a woman, are disproportionately discriminated against in our world. In 2013, transgender women of colour made up more than half of all LGBTQ homicide victims. With higher rates of poverty, harassment, violence, poor health, job discrimination and isolation, transgender women are one of the most vulnerable groups in the world today. Safe spaces, legislation, education and social supports are critical to the support and full inclusion of trans women and trans people.

4 **What needs to be done?**

• To achieve gender equality, we need political leadership, dedicated and increased resources, and partnerships throughout our society. Equality in education, employment, economic empowerment and leadership will all help to remove barriers for women, enabling women to be self-sufficient, supportive and safe from discrimination and gender-related hardships. We need more women involved to help other women access resources and improve their lives and the lives of their families.

• Female workers earn 10 to 30 per cent less than their male counterparts, according to the International Labour Organization. Fighting to decrease the gender pay gap is a key step, as is removing barriers that prevent women to reach leadership positions and implement gender equality policies.
Increasing access to primary and secondary education has incredible effects in the lives of girls. They are less likely to get pregnant and/or married early-on, which will help them stay in school longer. Reducing barriers such as making school more affordable, reducing distances to school, developing girl-friendly schools and promoting and implementing strategies for marginalized and out-of-school girls can help them access long-term education, increase their income and support themselves and their families. This helps break the cycle of poverty. Countries like Benin and Bangladesh are offering free schooling or reduced tuition for girls, encouraging them to enter school and delay marriage.

Companies need to break the glass ceiling for women and involve them in leadership. This will encourage more diverse perspectives, informed and inclusive decision-making, and higher returns on their investments. In the political realm, policies catered to the needs of women help the next generation of women achieve increased access and resources.

Increased education on harmful practices, cultural norms and forms of marginalization will help us to better understand the issues women and girls face, the rights they have and the responsibility of our government and institutions to protect them. Additionally, for society at large, learning how to dismantle sexist, violent and discriminatory language, attitudes and behaviours will contribute to changing our social and cultural understandings of discrimination and gender.

“Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns. Peace agreements that include women are more successful. Parliaments with more women take up a wider range of issues—including health, education, anti-discrimination and child support.”

Ban Ki-moon
Former Secretary-General of the United Nations
Globally, women and girls need increased access to health education, along with sexual and reproductive services and resources. Reducing barriers for women to ensure they understand and act on their rights supports the eradication of gendered health inequalities.

Two-thirds of illiterate people in the world are women. Increasing the quality of education and the number of students attending school requires a targeted focus on girls. Helping girls stay in school has incredible benefits for their future, the future of their communities and the future of our society as a whole.

Women comprise the largest percentage of the agricultural workforce; however, they often do not have control over land and production resources, which minimizes returns for their work. In addition, climate change-related disasters such as droughts and floods have serious effects on women farmers in particular in the Global South. Limited financial capacity can turn these shocks into a serious financial burden, continuing the cycle of poverty and increasing vulnerability. Women’s increased agricultural production helps guarantee self-sufficiency.
Consequences of Inaction

- If we fail to do something to ensure gender equality in all aspects of life, we are denying women a lifetime of opportunity, support and potential. When girls are deprived of health care or proper nutrition, their mortality rate increases, and without legal protection from child marriages, girls often have to sacrifice their education, health and economic opportunities.

- Without gender equality considerations in workforce policies, attitudes and behaviours, girls can be limited in their development and access to skills that will help support themselves and their community. The full participation of women in the labour force would add significant growth rates to national gross domestic product.

REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

Audre Lorde
Writer and activist