

## Opinion

by **genanet** and the Working Group 'Women' at the German NGO 'Forum on Environment and Development'  
supported by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF)

### Review of the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)

"Sustainable development should become the central objective of all sectors and policies. This means that policy makers must identify likely spillovers – good and bad – onto other policy areas and take them into account. Careful assessment of the full effects of a policy proposal must include estimates of its economic, environmental and social impacts inside and outside the EU. This should include, where relevant, the effects on gender equality and equal opportunities." (p. 6 EU SDS 2001)

We refer in the opinion below to this fundamental requirement of the EU SDS, which to our regret scarcely finds any further mention in further elaboration or under individual subject headings.

### Cornerstones of sustainable development from the gender perspective

A society in which unpaid care work and remunerated employment, levels of income and wealth, access to and management of natural resources, decision-making power and authority, rights and responsibilities and educational and career opportunities are divided unequally between the sexes is not a sustainable society. Rather, it is a society which is based on abstract economic growth targets and efficiency calculations, one which is biased toward the remunerated employment model and refuses to contemplate a different conception of society and the economy based on the precautionary principle.

What cornerstones does a conception based on gender justice need? What are its minimum requirements in terms of content, structure and procedure? What short-term and medium-term strategies should be developed and pursued in order to achieve it?

#### The gender dimension must be applied cross-sectionally

Our society, with all its institutions, processes and structures, is not gender-neutral, i.e. men and women, as well as the areas assigned to them, play differing roles in political and economic activity and are affected to differing degrees by the impact of this activity. Sustainable development therefore requires that gender aspects be incorporated into all policy-making and planning. The gender mainstreaming approach, which has been established as binding by decisions of the European Commission, is one factor which can contribute toward the achievement of this objective.

The gender dimension must be applied cross-sectionally in the further development of the sustainable development strategy (SDS). This will then make apparent not only the structural injustices but

also the distortions in the perception of problems and in the approaches to overcoming them which stem from a way of seeing things that is biased toward male reality.

We call upon the Commission responsible for the development and implementation of the European SDS, as well as on all Directorates-General, to include the gender dimension as a cross-sectional task in developing the strategy further and in establishing, revising and reviewing the overall key points of content and core issues of the strategy.

When focussing on gender relations across the board, it would be helpful to use one or more model projects to illustrate which (other) issues, approaches and perspectives could be considered.

### **Critical reflection on the fundamental categories of our society is required**

The SDS has to examine fundamental categories such as the economy and work and the associated concepts of growth and nature and to redesign these to fit future-proof models and principles.

#### *Concepts of the economy and work*

In the prevailing view of the economy, care and welfare work, domestic and community work, which is still performed predominantly by women, is discounted as non-productive. It is remunerated poorly or not at all, even though it secures the foundations of society and creates social capital. Instead, value is given in the economy to a biased focus on the (commodity-type) market and on remunerated employment that is geared toward a male career model (full-time employment). A gender-just economy based upon the principle of sustainability requires that a social and economic value be put on all those day-to-day realities and tasks which have in the past predominantly been carried out at home by women and for which they are still responsible today. The diverse welfare- and care-related activities of women must be made visible, recognized for their importance to society and integrated conceptually within macro-economic thinking as fundamental prerequisites of economic activity.

We call upon all concerned to make the daily necessities of caring for people, which form a basis for and normative requirement of any economic activity in society, key parameters of sustainable development approaches. This would then help pave the way to models of living which would enable all members of society, irrespective of their gender, to have career, family and/or charitable commitments without being cut off from social welfare for that reason.

In this context, it is important also to examine constructively approaches that have already been formulated, such as for example the concept of “sustainable livelihood”, which has been drawn up mainly by women from the countries of the “globalised South”, or the principles developed by feminist economists in the welfare management field (cooperation, thrift, orientation toward what is necessary to have a good life).

#### *Concept of growth*

Our commodity-based economics is based on the necessity for and guaranteeing of continuous growth. Particularly since the “collapse of socialism”, this fundamental orientation is accepted as a virtually unalterable fact that is no longer open to question, even in the debate about shaping a future-friendly society. We see the (now global) orientation toward the capitalist version of the growth model as being unsustainable and in need of fundamental revision. Instead, we advocate the development of alternative, non-growth-based economic systems and their consideration by society as being essential to sustainable development.

### *Concept of nature*

There is an urgent need, both at the scientific level and at the political level, for an examination of the poorly thought-out logic of subjugation and exploitation in the relationship between people and nature/the environment. Such logic determines on the one hand the understanding of nature in the prevailing economic system as being free and permanently available capital and on the other the view of it in the natural and technological sciences as an object which can be manipulated in virtually any way we wish. This understanding of nature as arrangeable, controllable and available is considered to be a causal component of the present global environmental crisis. Debates on the principles of society's understanding of nature and technology must at last be given the necessary scope in the discussion of sustainability.

It is therefore essential that empirical and research findings about the links between understandings of nature, the social and economic order and gender relations be incorporated both into analyses of the causes of the global crisis and into the development of prospective solution proposals.

### **The social, environmental and economic aspects of the sustainability strategy must be linked in an integrative way from a gender perspective**

The European sustainability strategy is only just beginning to meet the requirement for integrative handling of the three dimensions of sustainability. Where links are established, these are primarily between environmental and economic aspects. By contrast, the connections between the social and environmental dimensions or those between all three dimensions, e.g. ways of approaching nature, gender relations and the understanding of production, work and the economy, remain almost completely underexposed or bleached out. Particularly when looking at the question of what grounds and circumstances stand in the way of sustainable and gender-just development, it is essential to examine the systemic contexts. The same applies to the development of solution strategies. Looking at interrelations between problems from a gender perspective on the one hand increases one's awareness of areas which are construed as being separate or opposing but which actually belong together, and on the other hand also opens up new ways in which these areas can be substantively combined and dealt with.

We therefore call upon all researchers and planners in the sustainability field to take an integrative view of subject areas or practical areas which in conceptual terms act in opposing directions and to recognise them as context-dependent, mutually constraining and complementary areas of work. To date, most of these areas have been treated separately, both on the scientific/technical level and on the sectoral policy level (e.g. mobility and construction/housing, resource use and nature conservation, and development and/or production and utilisation and/or consumption of materials/products).

### **Use must be made of the findings of research on women/gender issues and support for it expanded**

Sustainability studies to date make clear the limited extent to which the findings of research into women/gender in relation to sustainability-relevant topics and issues are taken up. However, in order to be able to analyse the causes of the global crisis in a problem-oriented way and to develop the policy measures for implementing sustainable development to meet specific target group requirements, it is necessary to use data material that has been gender-disaggregated.

We therefore call upon the European Commission to hold a specialist public conference on the subject of “Gender aspects of the European sustainability strategy: the current status of policy progress in integration and implementation” every two years, to coincide with the evaluation of the sustainability strategy. Experts from the research and policy fields and representatives of the Directorates-General should be actively involved in this. Such an event could help to ensure not only that the findings of sustainability-relevant research into women/gender are recognised and reflected more widely, but also to raise awareness of the relevance of the gender dimension to society and of the possible ways of integrating it when dealing with combinations of substantive problems.

We additionally call upon the Directorates-General to help, within the scope of their own research and of their mechanisms for supporting research, to promote sustainability-relevant gender research and the recognition of such research.

### **Institutional and structural innovations are necessary preconditions for the effective establishment of the gender perspective**

In order for the Directorates-General to be able to manage the task of integrating the gender dimension successfully, structures will have to be put in place that will provide mutual support and enable an exchange of information. Within the Directorates-General, substantive and structural reorientations affecting a particular division could be prepared with the involvement of employees e.g. in project groups set up specifically for that purpose. To support this process, gender training courses (i.e. training to raise awareness of the relevance of gender relations) should be conducted at the senior and middle management and employee levels.

To support gender research in the sustainability context, it will be necessary to establish appropriate pools and networks of experts and to provide networking events. Last but not least, we see an urgent need for the award of grant funds and financial contributions in the field of sustainability research to be tied to the involvement of gender expertise or the inclusion in the planned research of an aspect examining gender relations.

### **The empowered involvement of women and gender experts in organizational processes must be ensured**

The greater involvement of women in social processes relating to the development of a sustainability strategy is articulated in all policy documents as an urgent requirement. In practice, however, women and gender experts tend to participate in informal policy procedures and not in formal decision-relevant processes. In order to develop the sustainability strategy further, it is therefore essential that all advisory committees and the management of individual Directorates-General be appointed on a gender-parity basis. This applies in particular to the new bodies which are to be set up, the ‘Round Table’ on sustainable development and the ‘Stakeholder Forum’ for evaluating the sustainability strategy. It must also be ensured, through the selection of personnel, that gender aspects and perspectives are appropriately represented. Enabling the networking and collaboration of gender experts through long-term financial support is an essential requirement for the empowerment of women, i.e. for the gender-just and empowered participation of women in decision-making and organizational processes within political, economic and academic institutions, and for securing a permanent place for gender-relevant issues in the mainstream of the sustainability debate.

### **Precautionary and performance-monitoring audit tools should be used**

Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Conference, and the Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women call for a review of the effects which environment and development policy measures have on women and men. Gender impact assessment (GIA) was developed as an instrument to identify potential impacts of policy decisions and strategies on gender relations. In Germany, this instrument has been tested on a number of case studies in the environmental field and, as a precautionary instrument, should be established as binding not only in all legislative projects but also in the development of policy measures and programmes (e.g. in the research field). A further instrument, the gender budget, which enables the gender-specific analysis of revenues and expenditures in state, local authority and institutional budgets, is still in its trial phase. The "gender budgeting" method can contribute substantially to the transparency and the gender-sensitive analysis and planning of public expenditure. We therefore consider its widespread introduction to be urgently necessary.

For the purposes of monitoring its own performance, we call upon the European Commission to take a decisive stand in relation to the implementation of gender justice, i.e. the activities and successes in this regard of individual directorates, in its reports on the status of implementation of sustainable development and of the further development/adaptation of the strategy. In order that progress in the implementation of gender justice in all subject areas and political decision-making processes can be checked, we see the need for further measures and campaigns as well as quality criteria and indicators to be developed.

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