One Planet – One Future

EQUITY AND RESILIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CARE AT RIO PLUS 20
Foreword

Our one planet is in a precarious state. We have been at this state before – but today the picture is much more bleak. Our planet’s trajectory towards sustainability is even further off track than 20 years ago, when that first UN Conference on Sustainable Development took place in Rio de Janeiro. We know the challenges and the solutions there, and we know them today. So what is holding us back to such an extent that science or resources are not the issue? It is a profound failure in our political and economic systems to stop social injustices, stunted poor and advanced environ- mental degradation. It is such a political will and ambition to improve the lives of millions of poor women and men and children.

Our current model of blunt economic growth delivers prosperity primarily for the global minority – people living in developed nations. While it has affected some of the world’s most vulnerable people out of poverty, it is failing the millions who are still living in grinding poverty. Economic growth is predicated on the exploitation of natural resources and increasingly comes at a devastating cost to our natural world. Global disparities in power and access to resources, coupled with the excessive consumption of our industrialised economies, are exacerbating social and economic inequality and driving environmental degradation, both locally through resource extraction and globally through the effects of climate change and other drivers. Such a development pathway – fuelled by environmental degradation and perpetuating social injustice – is truly unsustainable.

The extent of environmental degradation is now threatening to reverse our development gains. While there is some evidence of some improvement for the world’s most vulnerable people, poverty continues to grow. The extent of environmental degradation is now threatening to reverse our development gains, as the effects of climate change and other drivers continue to grow. There is a need to find solutions by highlighting the condition of our planet and the choices that we face.

The problems and solutions for delivering sustainable development are many. This report contributes to finding solutions by highlighting the condition of our planet and the choices that we face.

Global leaders coming to Rio+20 in June 2012 have the opportunity to signal the grave reality of the problems facing our one planet, and they also have the chance to act and collaborate on the real opportunities that are available to transition our economies with greater and sustainable development.

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Global food security is an issue that clearly demonstrates human reliance on natural resources to ensure sustainable development and its increasing consumption patterns. While there are numerous challenges ahead of us, CARE believes that addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is a critical aspect of ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities. While there are remaining challenges ahead of us, CARE believes that addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is a critical aspect of ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities.

To truly deliver upon sustainable development, any new development path must focus on ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities. While there are numerous challenges ahead of us, CARE believes that addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is a critical aspect of ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities.

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Gender inequality and women's empowerment
Gender inequality remains a critical barrier to sustainable development and social justice. The distribution of land and resources between men and women creates huge inequalities that continue to limit the development choices of half of the world's population and particularly those in the poorest communities. Women bear the brunt of increasing resource scarcity while providing free and unpaid labor for their families and communities. While there are numerous challenges ahead of us, CARE believes that addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is a critical aspect of ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities. While there are numerous challenges ahead of us, CARE believes that addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is a critical aspect of ensuring equity and building resilience within the global economy, within countries and within local communities.

While climate change is largely due to pollution generated by the industrialised countries, the world's poorest people are increasingly bearing the consequences of unsustainable development and its increasing consumption patterns. This comes at a time when we are increasingly recognising the value of natural capital and globally there are 13 billion hectares or less than 5% land that is 1.25 a day.

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Today our planet is home to more than seven billion people and will be home to two billion more by 2050.1 At the same time, economic and social inequity and environmental degradation are increasing, contributing to complex global crises. Growing global consumption and unsustainable practices are depleting our resources at an unprecedented pace, with the world’s species, water supplies, soils and forests in serious decline and the climate rapidly warming. And yet the poorest 10% of the world’s population, just 0.5% of the planet’s resources and goods in 2008 while the wealthiest 10% accounted for 59%.2

As explained by the UN High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, “sustainable development is fundamentally a question of people’s opportunities to influence their future, claim their rights and realize their aspirations. Unique opportunities and access to resources remain a serious obstacle to the economic and social well-being of many of the world’s poorest people, among whom women are disproportionately affected. Without action to address this in the architecture of a green economy, there is a risk that the poorest people will continue to be excluded and marginalized.”

But efforts towards sustainable development are increasingly challenged by a range of economic and environmental shocks and stresses, notably the impacts of climate change. Consequences, any of which could undermine the hard-fought gains that have been made, must therefore be faced. Building resilience is a critical concern for the world’s most vulnerable people, who tend to be disproportionately represented. Without due attention to equity in the architecture of a green economy, there is a risk that the poorest people will continue to be excluded, unable to access the benefits and opportunities that a new green economy offers.

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Rio+20: Little progress, growing challenges

Twenty years after the first Rio conferences, the planet and its inhabitants are under increasing pressure. By 2030, the world will need at least 50% more food, 45% more energy and 30% more water to meet the needs of a projected population of 9 billion consuming consumption patterns.

This comes at a time when we are increasingly connecting the planet's limits, and globally there are still 1 billion people living on less than $1.25 a day, 2 billion more people will be undernourished, 2.4 billion will be water-scarce, 1.3 billion people living on less than $1.25 a day will die from malnutrition each year as a result of the worsening impacts of climate change on agriculture. An additional 1.3 billion people whose livelihoods rely on agriculture, fishing and natural resources face the additional strain of poverty and the challenges that poor people face in meeting their everyday basic needs.

The current dominant economic growth models remain wedded to undermining the environment, leading to environmental degradation, which places unique burdens on them. Women, who provide most of the labour that sustains health, education and income generation for their families and communities, bear the brunt of increasing time scarcity while providing food, water and fuel for their families and communities. Each year in Africa alone, 40 billion hours of women's time are lost carrying water, and this is likely to increase with pressures from climate change and environmental degradation. Women also help their families and communities cope with economic, social and environmental shocks by providing additional labour for gathering resources to meet basic needs and by caring for those who are ill. Women face barriers to participation in decision-making, to leading meaningful political and social engagement that reflect their lives.

Global food insecurity is perhaps the issue that most hinders us in terms of immediate and future progress on the MDGs. Over seven people are hungry worldwide. The global food production capacity is insufficient to achieve MDG 1, arguably the most important and the most urgent goal of the MDGs, and is not sufficient to achieve MDG 3, though it could be with sustained global effort. The challenge is more acute in southern Asia, Africa and Latin America, where one billion people live in poverty, of whom two billion are below the $1.25-a-day poverty line and one billion more are undernourished. An estimated 1.3 billion people live on less than $1.25 a day, and 900 million more will be food-insecure by 2030. Yet, the current dominant economic growth models remain wedded to undervaluing and undermining the environment, leading to environmental degradation, which places unique burdens on them. Women, who provide most of the labour that sustains health, education and income generation for their families and communities, bear the brunt of increasing time scarcity while providing food, water and fuel for their families and communities. Each year in Africa alone, 40 billion hours of women's time are lost carrying water, and this is likely to increase with pressures from climate change and environmental degradation. Women also help their families and communities cope with economic, social and environmental shocks by providing additional labour for gathering resources to meet basic needs and by caring for those who are ill. Women face barriers to participation in decision-making, to leading meaningful political and social engagement that reflect their lives.

Gender inequality still remains a critical barrier to sustainable development and social justice and the need for women's empowerment is critical. While gender inequality poses challenges and specific pressures on both women and men in the face of increasing environmental pressures and economic shocks, nowhere in the world have women achieved equal status as men. Women's social status and productive roles need to be improved, particularly in smallholder agriculture.

The world is experiencing the fastest-ever loss of species, with estimates of 10 million species possibly expected to disappear by 2050. (15) Other 200 million people are affected by desertification and degradation, with some one billion people in over 100 countries at risk. These people include many of the world's poorest, most marginalised, and politically weak citizens. Hence combating desertification is key to the fight against poverty and the challenges that poor people face in meeting their everyday basic needs.

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It has been agreed upon and again by global leaders, the United Nations and numerous others that gender equality and women’s empowerment are fundamental to tackling the multidimensional challenges at the heart of sustainable development. For instance, in countries where women lack land ownership rights or access to credit, there are approximately 60% and 85% more malnourished children, respectively, than in countries where these rights and access are granted to both men and women.23 And yet many of the age-old challenges that gender equality and women’s empowerment are fundamental to tackling the multidimensional challenges at the heart of sustainable development issues such as water management,27 climate change and agriculture.28 Women still face significant social and structural barriers in local decision making more broadly impacting upon them.30

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Addressing gender inequality and women’s empowerment

Limitations on women’s decision-making powers and fundamental rights to participate in all spheres of life continue to constrain gender equality and women’s empowerment while underlining the progress of sustainable development. Women make up at least half the global population but only approximately 20% of parliamentary seats.24 At the same time, a study of 131 countries showed that those with greater numbers of women in parliament tended to sign more international environmental treaties.25 Furthermore, women occupy only 10% of ministerial posts; 35% of these posts are in social affairs and welfare, compared to 19% in finance and trade.26 This means that women are particularly under-represented in institutions and sectors addressing climate change and other sustainable development challenges as well as financial decisions impacting upon them.

Women and girls also continue to receive less training in the sciences and other fields necessary to facilitate their participation in sustainable development planning and decision making. The UN Secretary-General has highlighted that gender expectations and stereotypes continue to strongly discourage women from entering or advancing in the sciences.32 Greater access to such training would enable women to participate in policy, programmes and decision making for creating sustainable development and communities that are resilient to environmental, economic and social changes and shocks.23

A lack of access to modern services, such as improved water or energy services, contributes to girls’ absences from school. On average, rural women and girls spend between one and four hours a day gathering fuel and water needed for family meals.24 Therefore, additional pressures on natural resources required for food production and services as well as natural disasters, also undermine children’s education.

Being poor, female, and living in a country affected by conflict are the three most decisive factors determining whether or not children are enrolled in school.33 In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia respectively, 30 United Nations and we Can End Poverty 2015. 2011.

According to the United Nations, 50% of the world’s population is female and girls make up at least half of the total population of children. However, inequalities still persist, with 85 and 83 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia respectively.31 Therefore, additional pressures on natural resources required for food production and services as well as natural disasters, also undermine children’s education.

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A lack of education undermines the choices women have in life as well as their productivity. For example, in areas where women have limited amounts of education, a year of primary education provided to all women farmers would boost maize yields by 24%. Access to productive resources such as land, as well as an ability to access employment opportunities, remain among the most persistent challenges facing poor women worldwide. Inequalities based on social status, gender, age, ethnicity and class are at the root of these challenges and have significant implications for the health of communities, cultures and the global economy.

Stark disparities in women’s land ownership are apparent around the world, ranging from 5% in North Africa and West Asia to 25% in Ecuador and Chile. Furthermore, the land women do own is often of poorer quality and the land tenure is frequently insecure. Women own fewer animals needed for farming and frequently do not control the income from their livestock enterprises. Women farmers have significantly less access to modern inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and mechanical tools. This also means less credit and often do not control the credit they obtain. In most countries, female farmers’ access to credit is 5–10% lower than male farmers. Furthermore, female farmers typically own approximately 5% of agricultural cooperative services worldwide, leaving most of their needs unmet. This hinders their contribution to food security and reduces agricultural productivity, issues that were on the table at Rio+20 and beyond.

Creating resilient communities and a green economy will require building upon and maximising all the human capital available, and particularly supporting the role of women as key agents of change. It will also require a better understanding of current natural resource use and distribution as well as access to new opportunities across a range of sectors.

More equitable institutions, communities and households are needed to enable women, men, boys and girls of different social groups to support each other in working towards sustainable development as key agents of change. This will also require a better understanding of current natural resource use and distribution as well as access to new opportunities across a range of sectors.

Feeding a growing global population

No issue is more central to human survival, sustainable development and equity than agriculture and food security. LAHORE, Pakistan, it is estimated that a 2% increase in food production will be required in order to feed a world population of 9.1 billion people in 2050. Ensuring food security for all requires the provision of support for smallholder farmers, who feed a large portion of the global population and yet form the majority of the world’s undernourished. Social safety nets are vital, as a part of building resilience to environmental and economic shocks and ensuring access to sufficient food and nutrition for the most vulnerable. However, none of this will have a significant impact without a shift away from agricultural practices that undermine the natural resources we rely on to feed the growing population in coming years.

Feeding a growing global population
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SMALLHOLDER FARMERS, MOST OF WHOM ARE WOMEN, FEED UP TO 2 BILLION PEOPLE AND ACCOUNT FOR 60% OF GLOBAL AGRICULTURE YET THEY RECEIVE ONLY 2.2% OF GLOBAL LAND.

In recent years price volatility has made both smallholder farmers and poor households more vulnerable to market fluctuations and volatility as well as to damage from climate change.

Practices that reduce fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions are essential for ensuring food security in the long term, and they contribute to reducing carbon footprints in agriculture. Practices that reduce tilling, protect soil and reduce the need for irrigation have proven to have positive outcomes – including less need for agricultural inputs and greater resilience to climate change.

According to the Global Summit on Food Security, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) estimates that $1 trillion will be needed in the next two decades to feed a growing global population. The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, sustainable production is one of the most fundamental issues to act upon at Rio+20 in order to ensure equity and resilience as we set out to feed a growing global population.

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Sustainable development

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Tackling climate change

Climate change is one of the greatest environment and development challenges of our time. As such, the approaches we take to tackling climate change will become one of the most defining factors for the future of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned of the telltale signs of climate change, including already significant changes in rainfall and temperature extremes.  

Droughts are likely to occur more often in large portions of the globe; extreme rain events seen every 20 years are likely to occur every five to 15 years; the intensity of hurricanes will increase; and sea levels will rise. These climate events will have devastating consequences for human lives and livelihoods, particularly in developing countries. 

Despite the scope and severity of the impacts of climate change, current efforts to mitigate emissions are not nearly sufficient for keeping global warming below the 2°C threshold deemed safe for avoiding serious climate impacts. Emission levels forecast for 2020 would likely lead to a temperature increase of between 2.5–5°C by the end of the 21st century. It is highly unlikely that pledges to mitigate climate-causing activities made by countries in the UNFCCC agreement in Durban in 2011 will be enough to prevent warming above 2°C, unless significant emission reductions are made immediately. 

The World Bank has estimated that by 2030 $275 billion per year will be needed for adaptation and mitigation finance. Further estimates indicate that the cost of mitigation action needed to bring warming to 2°C warming would be roughly 2.5% of global GDP in 2050. While this is significant, it is a small step when weighed against the fact that inaction could cost 14% of average world consumption per capita. Furthermore, estimates show that for every dollar spent on disaster prevention, 7 dollars are saved in emergency aid. The full recognition that early action to reduce emissions and ensure climate adaptation is more cost effective than inaction needs to be central to discussions. Regardless of these factors, many developed countries most responsible for causing climate change have yet to step up urgent and ambitious domestic action and financial support for tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation both at home and abroad. 

The world’s poorest and most vulnerable people are likely to bear the greatest brunt of the impacts of climate change. Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to suffer direct impacts of natural disasters. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to climate-related shocks and stresses, such as drought, floods, and storms, which disproportionately affect them. Women and children are often responsible for collecting water and firewood, which can be more difficult and time-consuming due to climate change. They may also be responsible for caring for younger children or elderly family members, who are more vulnerable to health impacts of climate change. Women and children are also often the ones who are most affected by climate-related migration, as they may need to leave their homes to find work or to escape conflict and violence. 

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71 United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability. 2012. Resilient people, resilient planet. 
72 OECD. 2012. OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050: The Consequences of Inaction. 
74 Ibid. 
75 Ibid. 
While climate change is largely due to pollution generated by wealthy countries in the process of industrialisation, developing countries will bear 75–80% of costs of the damages. This will undermine many of the development advances made in recent years. Local Developed Countries (LDCs) are some of the most vulnerable to climate change due to their limited ability to recover from climate stresses and their economic dependence on climate-sensitive sectors. Within these countries, the world’s poor and most vulnerable communities are already being hit the hardest by climate change. In the future, one of the most important food staples for poor people, may decline by up to 10% for every 1°C rise in temperature. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa could experience catastrophic declines in agricultural production of 20–30% by 2080, with some countries experiencing up to 50%.

Many of the changes needed to put us on a sustainable path require significant investment in technology and infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, there are concerns that for some developing countries doing so may hinder their own development. Until now, economic growth has been closely tied to increasing emissions in most countries around the world, with only a few exceptions. This emphasises the need to move towards a green economy, finding ways to decouple economic growth from polluting industries and production in the future, while at the same time increasing human development and eradicating poverty.

At the same time, even with urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the global community is committed to the reality that we are already locked in to increasing climate change impacts in the coming decades. The most vulnerable people in developing countries are already bearing the brunt of climate change impacts; they need resources and tools to adapt to changes and make plans for climate-resilient development in the years ahead. With this in mind, the Rio+20 must hammer home the message that development gains will be reversed unless urgent efforts are made to avoid irreversible climate impacts. This must be at the heart of any sustainable development and green economy policies and planning, and should take into account gender equality and inclusion of the most vulnerable communities and people.

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climatE chanGe alone coulD reduCe developinG countrieS’ agricuLtural prOduc tion by up to 16% wiTh sigNificanT impaCts for food seCurity and nutritiOn

in order for the Rio+20 outcomes to effectively address sustainable development challenges in a way that is equitable and builds resilience, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable people, it must put into place the appropriate objectives, mechanisms and measures to enable action by actors at all levels. However, much of the success will depend upon key enabling factors such as ensuring that economic growth is inclusive, that good governance and appropriate institutions are in place, and that future developments are based on building resilient and equitable communities.

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80 Christian Aid. 2009. Community Answers to Climate Chaos: Getting climate justice from the UNFCCC.
Given the magnitude of the challenges faced by people and the planet, there is growing recognition that we must overhaul our economic systems to create a green economy that restores and equitably safeguards the resilience of the environment while using nature’s resources sustainably and equitably.1

This can only be done with an understanding of the root causes of the challenges we face and a focus on the risks, poxes and resilience of our economic system. A green economy has the potential to make significant changes to our economy, such as improving its sustainability if properly designed and governed.

The design of a green economy must ensure the potential economic benefits of a green economy are shared by the poorest and most vulnerable who are suffering from the degradation of their environment, are supported to participate in growing green employment as well as contributing to and benefitting from a green economy.

Key enablers for equitable and resilient sustainable development

Ensuring economic growth is inclusive and sustainable

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Recommmendations:

- Commit to a rights-based approach that ensures equal participation and universal access to health services, food, water and sanitation services, energy, shelter, education and decent work for both current and future generations. This includes realising the importance of gender equality and women’s rights.
- Ensure participations of multiple stakeholders, particularly women and unrepresented groups such as poor and vulnerable communities, in decision-making processes to ensure leadership in a green and equitable economy.
- Incorporate the plans for a green economy to contribute economic models to badass specific dimensions of sustainable development challenges such as poverty, climate changes, deforestation, and desertification in the MDGs.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment

- Ensure gender equality and women’s equal access to education and training opportunities through green employment, inheritance rights and access to credit that they can take to contribute to inclusive and resilient communities for the future of their ability.
- Support policies and programmes that incentivise education and training for women and girls, which they need in order to participate in sustainable development and opportunities generated by a green economy. This includes providing solutions that help women and girls gain access to education and employment.
- Undertake analysis for and dedicate resources to closing the gender gap in policies and programmes targeted at climate change and food security issues. This should support efforts to ensure full participation of women and girls in climate and food security issues. This should support efforts to ensure full participation of women and girls in climate and food security issues.
- Gender equality and women’s empowerment

- Prioritise adaptation and resilience to climate change in green economy discussions as essential for the poorest and most vulnerable groups most affected.
- Ensure that Rio+20 discussions fully and explicitly recognise that urgent action on climate change must be part of a global action plan for sustainable development.
- Prioritise adaptation and resilience to climate change in green economy discussions as essential for the poorest and most vulnerable groups most affected.
- Pursue developed country mitigation strategies, by shifting to low-carbon development pathways while developing countries must increase their ambition levels to more than 40% emission reduction below 1990 levels by 2020 and over 90% by 2050. They must also allocate finance, technologies and capacity building to help developing countries invest in adaptation and disaster risk reduction and transitions their development to low-carbon and climate-resilient pathways.

- Prioritise sustainable and climate-resilient food production through increased investment in agro-ecological approaches, ensuring food security and tackling issues such as the unsustainable use of natural resources in current models and how the shift towards a new model of agriculture affects food security, particularly of women and smallholder farmers.
- Ensure that discussions of a green economy draw on essential details of a green, resilient and equitable food economy.
- Commit to a rights-based approach that ensures equal participation and universal access to health services, food, water and sanitation services, energy, shelter, education and decent work for both current and future generations. This includes realising the importance of gender equality and women’s rights.
- Ensure participations of multiple stakeholders, particularly women and unrepresented groups such as poor and vulnerable communities, in decision-making processes to ensure leadership in a green and equitable economy.
- Incorporate the plans for a green economy to contribute economic models to badass specific dimensions of sustainable development challenges such as poverty, climate changes, deforestation, and desertification in the MDGs.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment

- Ensure gender equality and women’s equal access to education and training opportunities through green employment, inheritance rights and access to credit that they can take to contribute to inclusive and resilient communities for the future of their ability.
- Support policies and programmes that incentivise education and training for women and girls, which they need in order to participate in sustainable development and opportunities generated by a green economy. This includes providing solutions that help women and girls gain access to education and employment.
- Undertake analysis for and dedicate resources to closing the gender gap in policies and programmes targeted at climate change and food security issues. This should support efforts to ensure full participation of women and girls in climate and food security issues. This should support efforts to ensure full participation of women and girls in climate and food security issues.
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By pooling expertise, information and resources, in addition, they can amplify the efforts and the setting of SdGs can create synergies in work towards equitable and resilient communities. However, if addressed properly, the MdG review process, a post-2015 development agenda and be integrated into a global overarching agenda. The MdGs have been met. Creation of SdGs must not in any way detract from MdG efforts and must set of sustainable development goals (SdGs) at Rio+20 before previously set goals such as the in light of this, there is widespread concern about the emergence of new processes to create a process of sustainable development. Because of the complex nature of the challenges we face, we should not compartmentalise disciplines, departments and ministries. Furthermore, sustainable development planning must be integrated into a global overarching agenda and policies and interdisciplinary processes and mechanisms.

In light of this, there is a widespread concern about the emergence of new processes to create a global agenda for sustainable development. In addition, the setting of SdGs can create synergies in work towards equitable and resilient communities. However, if addressed properly, the MdG review process, a post-2015 development agenda and be integrated into a global overarching agenda. The MdGs have been met. Creation of SdGs must not in any way detract from MdG efforts and must set of sustainable development goals (SdGs) at Rio+20 before previously set goals such as the. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the mainstreaming of social sustainability and social policies and programmes.

While governments and large businesses may be hesitant to give stronger rights to local people, evidence shows that there are numerous opportunities for profitable, long-term projects and sustainable natural resource management. In addition, local control of natural assets is a route to increasing investment in, and sustainable use of our natural resources.83

Lack of investment has been one of the largest barriers to implementing sustainable development goals. The role of the private sector, and specifically local business, is critical to enable the green agenda to succeed in this area. Historically, however,چنالموسیلام (چاپ 2015) has been a failure as a means to achieve this. As a result, the need to develop new, and innovative approaches to addressing the needs of the poor and marginalized.

To this end, the private sector can play an important role in delivering these changes. However, many of the players who are not yet contributive to the green economy agenda are often located in the lower end of the value chain, which means that they may not be able to contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment

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Gender equality is essential for the achievement of sustainable development goals. Women’s empowerment and leadership at all levels, as they are the foundation of inclusive decision-making processes and mechanisms.

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Managing risks and building resilience

The world has seen an increasing number of interconnected crises — including the financial crisis, the food crisis and increasing climate change crisis. Urgent steps to such shocks is needed in poverty, gender inequality, lack of fulfilment of basic human rights, and reliance upon increased resilience to shocks.1

Without adequate responses and proper resilience strategies, ongoing shocks have the potential to undermine the development paths of poor households.

Strategies for responding to shocks can affect how many people will live in poverty. They can also influence the extent and impact of natural disasters, health and community well-being, the sustainability of housing and food supplies, educational attainments and the livelihoods of new work opportunities, among others. Governments can build resilience to such shocks with policies that build in long-term capacity and that promote diverse economic activities and climate-resilient growth.2

However, for a significant amount of economic growth that has not only yielded and led to economic and social shock has been based on undermining natural resources and the environment.3

Natural disasters, many of which are related to climate change, are on the rise and are one of the leading causes of economic shocks.4 In addition to having social and environmental impacts, the world’s poorest are bearing the brunt of the impacts and yet are least able to deal with the consequences.5

In the past 20 years, more than 1.3 billion people have experienced extreme events.6

Extreme weather events also compromise food security, nutrition, and ultimately saving potential. These shocks can be accompanied by economic pressures as well as political upheavals and conflicts.7

Women and children are particularly affected by such shocks.8

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We now live in an increasingly interdependent globalised society — sharing the resources, benefits and challenges this poses. Twenty years after the first Rio UNCED conference, the world is facing an increasing number of interdependent global and local crises that are becoming increasingly interconnected and complex. At the same time, the science is increasingly clear that if we fail to act with urgency and ambition, the costs and impacts for all will be much higher. What we choose to do over the next few years will dictate whether or not we reach a point of no return, or whether we achieve true sustainability to the extent needed in order to continue to call this one planet our home.

Towards the great transition

This transition requires unprecedented global leadership in government, multinational agencies and civil society to renew commitments to tackling challenges such as gender inequality, food security and climate change. That commitments alone are not enough. They must be met with a sense of immediate urgency and political will at a level greater than what we have seen in the past decades and must be backed on coordination, fulfilment of existing promises and a shared vision for sustainable development.

The path ahead of us is rife with many challenges — challenges that require building equitable and resilient communities. We have the resources and much of the know-how to tackle these. However, we need a new kind of solution, one that is demonstrably tangible action rather than words that provide a trickle-down of resources and measurable efforts, and that offers an opportunity for everyone to participate in and benefit from our common future. There has never been a more urgent time for action to right glaring social and environmental injustices of our current society and to chart a new course for a truly sustainable, equitable and resilient future for our one planet.

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