



International  
Labour  
Organization

# GENDER EQUALITY AND GREEN JOBS



## POLICY BRIEF

Green Jobs for Sustainable Development  
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is now widely acknowledged as a central aspect of development. Besides being a right in itself, gender equality is also an end in itself. It is one of the fundamental requirements for achieving sustainable development and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the eradication of poverty and hunger (UN 2012; UNDP 2011; OECD 2010). This is clearly reiterated in the Millennium Declaration, Agenda 21, Rio+20 Outcome, Rio Conventions and the Hyogo Framework for Action and expected to feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda. Without consistent gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable. As nations transition towards greener economies and aspire to improve the livelihoods of people and communities through the creation of green jobs that are decent (See Box 1), gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable. The transition must build on the existing gender equality commitments.

For the International Labour Organization (ILO), gender equality has been the core value of its work since its founding in 1919. The pursuit for gender equality is grounded on its recognition that equality is not just an intrinsic value and a right in itself, but also instrumental in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction.

While the ILO recognizes that green jobs and the promotion of the green economy are pivotal for achieving economic and social development that is also environmentally sustainable, it also recognizes the importance of gender equality in the world of work to advance the greening of economies. As a means of promoting employment and the overall functioning of labour markets in the green economy, the ILO supports the integration of gender equality into the broader policy agenda (climate-resilient strategies, sustainable growth and poverty reduction). Strategies and approaches to develop the Green Economy must therefore be fully gender mainstreamed.

This policy brief aims to contribute to the discussion on how gender equality can become an integral part of green economy strategies and how equal access for women and men to green jobs which are decent can be enhanced. The policy brief is targeted at policy makers, social partners and ILO staff in the field working on green jobs/green economy issues.

## Definition of Terms

The most widely used and authoritative definition for green economy is the UNEP definition that states,

[A] **green economy** [is] one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities (UNEP 2011).

The ILO defines **green jobs** as “the transformation of economies, enterprises, workplaces and labour markets into a sustainable, low-carbon economy providing decent work” (ILO, 2012a)

**Decent work** is defined by the ILO as being productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity

**Gender** has been widely defined to refer to the socially constructed differences between women and men

**Gender Equality** refers to women and men having equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. It requires that women and men become full partners in their home, their workplace, their community and their society.

**Gender Mainstreaming** is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.

## 2. BACK GROUND

Gender inequalities are rooted in the different roles and identities given to individuals depending on whether they are male or female (OECD 2009). Within the labour market, gender inequalities are fostered and maintained by the same traditional structures that assign women and men to particular roles, which in turn create gender differentiated expectations, with several implications for equitable sustainable economic and social development. In most cases, it is the women who are affected (Box 2) and limited in their choice of employment across sectors. They are segregated into particular types of occupations which are vulnerable and insecure (ILO 2012c). Women are more likely than men to end up in jobs with low pay, low security and limited social mobility. In addition, they are often heavily represented in the informal economy, where their exposure to risk of exploitation is usually greatest with the least formal protection (ILO 2011). Eight out of ten women workers for example are considered to be in vulnerable employment in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with global economic changes taking a huge toll on their livelihoods (Guerrero and Stock 2012).

While there has been undoubted progress in promoting gender equality in the workplace and elsewhere through binding international and national legal gender frameworks, these realities continue to exist to differing degrees in every ILO member State. For example, at the time of writing 13 out of 185 (7%) of ILO member States have a female head of government; very few women occupy corporate executive positions, global poverty has retained a predominantly female face and women continue to shoulder the vast bulk of responsibilities in the home, limiting their opportunities in the outside world. Progress in addressing gender inequality has been slow and inconsistent. Much more remains to be done. Through the creation of green jobs, the green economy offers the potential to change the current situation in the labour market. It provides a conceptual starting point for making women's contributions to society and the economy visible as well as the opportunity to revalue them. This however requires rethinking the green economy from

a gender perspective. Failure to do so will result in the perpetuation of existing gender inequalities in many sectors of the economy, preventing the achievement of sustainable development goals and poverty eradication.

### Inequalities and women's work world wide

Women in Europe still work 59 days 'for free'. The gender pay gap - the average difference between women and men's hourly earnings across the entire economy has stagnated at 16.4% reflecting the on-going discrimination and inequalities in the labour market (European Commission, 2014).

Firm managers in China prefer to sign export contracts with men because women have limited access to productive assets, lack statutory rights over land, and have less authority over family (and therefore over potential farm labour) (World Bank, 2012)

Only 10% to 20% of women in developing countries have land rights despite being the majority of small-hold farmers and critical for the transition to sustainable agricultural practices. They also hold fewer assets and face more challenges attaining credit (FAO, 2011).

Female entrepreneurs in developing countries receive different treatment relative to men with respect to access to institutions and credit, property rights, taxation and their ability to start a business is inhibited (World Bank, 2010)

### 3. WHY GENDER EQUITABLE GREEN JOBS MATTER IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

*“Gender equity should not be seen narrowly as a women’s issue..., it is an issue that requires men and women to work together in search of solutions that are both practical and based on principle. Increasingly, those solutions will be neither acceptable nor sustainable if the equal rights, dignity and worth of men and women are not respected.”* (Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO)

The creation of green jobs is one of the green economy strategies intended to improve social well-being and equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is within this context that equal rights, dignity and worth of women and men must be respected. This calls for countries to live up to their obligations under the ILO’s agenda of social justice and decent work, and the UN’s international human rights framework. Acknowledging the gender imbalances and differences is critical for ensuring women and men equally participate and benefit from the opportunities the green economy presents.

There is strong evidence to make a case for why gender matters for effective greening of economies (UN Women 2013; World Bank 2012; UNEP 2011; UNEP 2004). Though the list is not exhaustive, evidence has shown that there are significant gender differences in; social and economic development; consumption patterns; aspirations; access and use of knowledge; approach to environmental issues; ecological footprints; use, access and control of environmental resources; and management of the environment. Incorporating all these difference to engender the green economy is critical and has significant benefits for economic efficiency, social equity and environmental sustainability. Taking into account the gender perspectives allows for targeted actions, creative solution, increased flexibility, better environmental management, effective investment, enhanced cost-recovery, enhanced ownership, enhanced distribution of resources, enhanced empowerment and reduction of poverty.

It has been noted for example, that putting more income in the hands of women yields beneficial results for general human development, as they tend to invest more in children’s nutrition, health and education (OECD 2011; World Bank 2011). As a strategy for combating poverty, hunger and diseases to achieve all other development goals, women’s fair access to green jobs that are decent will not only empower them but also lead to greater and more sustainable social and economic growth.

As key actors for environmental protection, women possess knowledge, capabilities and effective networks to drive real solutions in the area of sustainability and resource scarcity. Most importantly, they hold key roles across society that influences how to produce, consume and market sustainable solutions. Women are therefore important agents of change and their contribution and participation in green economic activities is essential for achieving equitable sustainable development.

In addition, given that women make up a little over half of the world’s population (The World Economic Forum 2013; IMF 2013; Green 2008), with untapped talent that could significantly further economic development (IMF 2013; UNDP 2013; ILO 2012; World Bank 2011), it makes economic sense to promote and mainstream gender in initiatives for greening economies. Studies conducted by The World Economic Forum (2013) revealed a strong correlation between a country’s gender gap<sup>1</sup> and its national competitiveness, income and development. The studies conclude that a nation’s competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilizes its women and men equally—that is, enable women to access the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men. Failure to consider the perspective of slightly more than half of the world’s population could prove detrimental to realising the vision set for the green economy.

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1 Gender Gap: the differences between women and men, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes

## 4. GREEN JOBS OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Greening of economies has the potential to pay higher wages and offer career paths to workers with diverse skills and education levels. It offers medium- to long-term career building and training opportunities (Sustain Labour 2013; UNEP/ILO/IOE/ITUC 2008). Due to pre-existing gender inequalities however, there has been concern that green investments may not necessarily guarantee equal access to green and decent jobs for women, nor provide the services and key resources that might position them effectively for green and decent job opportunities. There are also concerns that women's access to green job opportunities may further be limited due to inadequate training and experience. In addition, many of the green jobs are expected to become concentrated in parts of the economy with historically limited female representation (Sustain Labour 2013; Sustain Labour 2009; ILO 2012).

Opportunities for women to access green and decent jobs in the green economy do exist. The emerging green sector offers an opportunity to address the many pre-existing employment challenges faced by women in the non-green labour market. It is possible, especially given the unprecedented opportunity to educate and train a diverse set of workers, including women, to benefit from the developing green economy (ILO 2012). There are opportunities for women to advance from low-skill, entry-level positions to high-skill, higher-paying green jobs (Women's Bureau US Department of Labor 2012) allowing them to become economically secure to support themselves and their families. There are opportunities for women to train for jobs that are traditionally dominated by men. Opportunities also exist for women to become green entrepreneurs by starting their own green businesses and becoming green employers rather than employees. In one sense, the green economy offers a blank slate, and new opportunities to promote equality between women and men.

The Grameen Shakti (GS) microloans initiative in Bangladesh is a good example of women's participation in greening the energy sector. The initiative helped to install more than 100,000 solar home systems in rural communities and has trained over

5,000 women as solar PV technicians and maintenance workers (ILO 2009). This has empowered women enabling them to set up their own energy business. They are equipped with knowledge that allows them to take care of their energy systems. They have access to clean energy providing health benefits and as well as freeing up time to engage in income generating activities.

While sex-disaggregated data is limited and there is no indication of how many green jobs will be for women or for men, some 2.3 million women and men are said to have found jobs in the renewable energy sector in recent years. It is estimated that by 2030 at least 20 million additional jobs would be created in this sector (UNEP 2011). Generally sex-disaggregated data is limited world-wide due to delayed reporting of official national statistics, data not being collated and in some cases collected but not reported or analysed to be used beyond its collection.

Primary sectors such as agriculture, forestry and energy are expected to be major beneficiaries of the transition to a low-carbon economy that could raise the proportion of green and decent jobs. Given their dependency of these sectors, it is anticipated that women could benefit by turning their natural resource dependency into green and decent job opportunities.

### Women in Ecotourism

Women in the coastal Kenyan town of Gazi have established a community-based tourism venture that profits from the value of the mangrove's scenic beauty and biodiversity. In Costa Rica the indigenous women of the Yorquin community have developed and are managing an ecotourism programme providing realistic employment opportunities for young and adult members of the community. Women in Thailand are involved in organizing eco-tours to northern forested regions as a basis of community development (UNWTO, 2009).



In many developing countries, though unrecognized and undervalued, women as forest stewards, farmers, natural resource managers and entrepreneurs already engage in green economic activities. In India for example women are managing small green businesses based on forest and agricultural products allowing them to participate in the workforce both as labourers and entrepreneurs (Jadhav 2009). Ecotourism is another sector that has immense potential for green and decent job opportunities for women (see Box 3). Within the waste management and recycling sector women are also making their mark (see box 4). Policy interventions need to start taking note of such developments and overcome discriminatory attitudes to enable women to profit from activities and enterprises based on primary production.

### Women Waste Collectors as Green Worker

In the city of Pune in India, a union (Waste Collectors' Union KKP KP) is promoting a socially and ecologically innovative model of waste recovery that has secured concrete benefits for mainly women waste collectors. This initiative has secured employment for about 9500 waste collectors of whom 90% are women. Over two thirds these workers are affiliated to the Waste Collectors' Union KKP KP. The union has been working with local authorities to integrate an ecological dimension into local waste management. In the past all the waste was placed in bins on the roadside and municipal trucks would remove the waste to a dump. A union study revealed that 90% of the waste was biodegradable, and most of the trucks were collecting rubbish unnecessarily, and wasting huge amounts of public money.

The union is promoting the separation of waste at the household level whereby families divide their waste into biodegradable and non-biodegradable. The waste collectors go from house to house to collect it and then sell what can be sold. What cannot be reused is sent to the dump, and the biodegradable waste is composted at the source. Through such initiatives, empowered unions can generate economic savings and environmental benefits as well as social gains for women workers.

Source: <http://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/glimpses/women-waste-collectors-india>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A green economy without the inclusion of gender equality is inconsistent with the ILO's Decent Work agenda. All measures must be taken to ensure that pre-existing gender inequalities are not transferred to the emerging green economy and the opportunities for women in the changing labour market must be identified and grasped. Women and men must be encouraged and given the necessary support to enable equal access and benefit from green jobs. In the quest for promoting gender equality in the world of work, ILO already has programmes and tools in place (Table 1) that could be adapted to promote gender equality in the emerging green job sectors.

Countries that are progressing in addressing gender inequalities in the labour market tend to have high educational attainment for both women and men, greater political commitment to gender equality, national policies that facilitate the participation of women in the labour force, and good enforcement mechanisms with respect to laws prohibiting gender discrimination in the workplace and ensuring that women have equal access to political and economic participation (see The Global Economic Forum report). Lessons can be drawn from such good practices to advance gender equality in the greening of economies.



Table 1: ILO programmes and tools adaptable for promoting gender equality in the emerging green job sectors.

ILO Tool/programme	Purpose
The Green Jobs Programme	Supports the assessment of existing and potential green jobs as well as skill needs assessments at national and sectoral level. The assessment methodologies are useful tools for promoting the collection of sex-disaggregated data to enhance national statistical capacity.
Gender Mainstreaming Strategies (GEMS) Tool Kit	A set of 12 practical tools to facilitate the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in organizations, policies, programmes and projects.
ILO Gender Equality Tool	Open and Virtual Learning Space (website) on Mainstreaming Gender Equality.
The ILO Gender, Poverty and Employment (GPE)	A training programme designed to build capacity in an effort to expand income opportunities for women entrepreneurs by improving their business skills and access to resources.
The ILO skills development initiatives	Designed to develop skills, hence increasing employability. The initiative can be used to promote gender equality in green job sectors by ensuring that training, education and development programmes are gender sensitive.
ILO International Training Centre	Supports training and capacity development activities on gender equity and women's empowerment to advance the achievement of equality and decent work for all women and men.
The multimedia modular training and information package	Designed to stimulate effective action at the national, regional and local levels by strengthening constituents' capacity for action in terms of policies and programmes regarding gender equality, poverty eradication and employment promotion. It provide indicative guidelines for action in a number of policy areas, such as financial resource management, access to assets, wage employment, training and social protection.
ILO Social Protection Floors	Powerful tools for reducing gender inequalities and women's poverty. Through labour protection and social justice the tools can play a vital role in ensuring women's economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty are prevented or eliminated in the greening of economies.
Social dialogue	Focused on the voice and visibility of women through social dialogue. An essential tool for ensuring real progress in attaining gender equality in the greening of economies, by ensuring equal representation and participation of women and men in all types of negotiations and consultations at all levels.
Green entrepreneurship and green enterprise	Promotes (green) entrepreneurship among women. Include training programmes for women on green entrepreneurship, access to finance and resources and skills development.

Ensuring gender equitable green and decent jobs in the greening of economies will require the engagement and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders - governments, employer's, gender institutions and experts, civil society (women and men), workers (women and men) education and social institutions, non-governmental organizations, labour and human rights organizations, community-based organizations, businesses and policy and decision makers. Through social dialogue all these stakeholders should cooperate in the designing, implementation and enforcement of gender responsive policies. This requires considering the following;

- All relevant stakeholders should collaborate and challenge discriminatory social norms and traditions that make it difficult for women to pursue education and training in fields with green job opportunities. This is key to advancing gender equality in the greening of economies.
- Governments should make gender equality a cornerstone of their constitutional and legal frameworks to promote gender responsive governance, attitudes, behaviours and practices in the greening of their economies.
- A gender analysis should be conducted at both national and local level in various green job sectors to address lack of sex-disaggregated data required to inform and mainstream gender in employment policies. The data is also critical for understanding constraints affecting women and men's equal representation and participation in green job sectors. Gender-based analysis tools should be used to collect the sex-disaggregated data. A gender analysis is an essential first step of mainstreaming gender in an gender responsive initiatives. Gender analysis can be commissioned by government bodies, NGOs, project donors, private institutions, labour organizations and other stakeholders that require sex-disaggregated data to inform gender responsive green initiatives. The analysis can be conducted by research and academic institutions in collaboration with gender experts.
- Governments should establish a strong foundation at national and local level to enable all relevant stakeholders at all levels to accept responsibility for gender equality outcomes in greening job sectors. This can be done through capacity building and creating awareness on the importance and benefits of mainstreaming gender in the green job sectors.
- Governments should put in place accountability procedures to ensure all relevant stakeholders are held accountable for operating in a gender-responsive manner to achieve set gender equality outcomes in the green job sectors. This can be done through gender responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that interventions put in place to advance gender equality in the green job sector are having the impact they are designed to have.
- Policy and decision makers should ensure employment and skills development policies designed for green job sectors are gender responsive, well informed, coherent and broadly supported by all relevant stakeholders. They must ensure that green job policies harness already existing international gender frameworks and treaties.
- A skills needs analysis should be conducted at government and institutional level, to establish skills required by men and women to equally participate and benefit from opportunities created in the green job sectors. This should be done in collaboration with employers and labour organizations. The information should be used to create targeted green skills development and training initiatives for men and women.
- All relevant stakeholders (e.g. governments, education institutions, project donors, private investors) must ensure funding and resource allocation prioritizes programs that train women for non-traditional positions which will enable them to make a transition into male-dominated occupations in the green economy. Investing in women and girls will not only enhance gender equitable access to green and decent jobs, but will also promote cleaner and more equitable development.

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**For more information, please refer to [ilo.org/greenjobs](http://ilo.org/greenjobs)**

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