



GENDER JUSTICE

Equality for women as a driver for development

Abstract

Gender equality is a human right. Women are disadvantaged in almost all societies and suffer discrimination in many places. They perform the larger proportion of unpaid work, particularly in rural areas. They often bear alone the burdens of running households, taking care of and bringing up children as well as caring for the old and sick.

In Asia and Africa it is estimated that half of all food is produced by women; in Latin America the figure is about 20 percent. This makes it particularly important to strengthen the position of women in countries affected by hunger. Investments in women's education and health are of great significance in the battle against poverty.

Development efforts can only be successful when all actors (men and women) build on the active participation of women – who usually form the most active population in small-scale agriculture. Apart from recognising the value of their work, securing their economical inclusion and ensuring that they are receiving fair benefit from the fruits of their work, it is also important to effectively reinforce women's rights to social and political participation. Gender justice is essential to achieving sustainable rural development.

For all the diversity of women's situations in developing countries, they have one thing in common: Their contribution to the production and processing of local basic foods is always decisive. Agriculture is becoming "feminised", particularly in regions where it provides only marginal income opportunities. It is almost always women who care for particularly vulnerable groups such as children, old people, the sick or disabled; they also do almost all housework. At the same time, women are disproportionately affected by poverty and hunger. The number of women living below the poverty line has increased by half since the 1970s, while the number of men affected has risen by 30 percent. If the status of men and women were brought into line, the number of malnourished children in South Asia would decrease by 13.4 million and in Africa by 1.7 million.

In regions where women have a better position (education, access to resources, income, political representation, legal status), they are better fed and can provide better for their families. However, it is not enough to focus on the welfare of women and their families. Women's human rights overall must be put into practice. Only then will women be able to participate in political decision-making processes, articulate their own interests, earn money and be self-sufficient. To achieve this, the power balance between men and women must be resolutely shifted in favour of women.

The empowerment of women has long been a goal of development cooperation. Gender mainstreaming is currently the most popular instrument. Using this tool, development programmes and projects are monitored and assessed in relation to their effectiveness in promoting gender equality. This also applies in cases where at first glance the decisions to be taken have nothing to do with gender issues. To give two examples: Would those involved in a project prefer food or cash in return for their work? Men usually go for the cash. Which crops should be cultivated? Men usually prefer crops that can be exported.

Gender justice and equal opportunities must be part of all rural development programmes. In many societies, this entails changing patterns in the division of labour. In most developing countries, men are engaged in the cash economy while women are responsible for the production of food and the household tasks. Women need opportunities to take up formal and informal work outside the home. It is important in this context that they do not end up in marginalised sectors but are given real opportunities in the market. For fair competitiveness, support especially in relation to their education and access to resources is needed (cf. Sections 2 on the economy, 8 on civil society and 9 on access to land).

Awareness raising and capacity development are also required to encourage women to make their voices heard on an equal basis on all political and social issues. Educational opportunities are just as vital in this context as in relation to strengthening women's economic position.

In principle, the same options and freedom of action that men expect must also be available to women. Men must learn to share power and responsibility, this includes taking on tasks which have previously been carried out by women. If this does not occur, the economic inclusion of women will simply result in an additional work burden. In general terms, men's behaviour has a great influence on the achievement of gender justice. This can be seen directly in regard to the welfare of women and girls. Domestic violence decreases when the position of women is strengthened. Less obviously, the general prosperity of the household (including that of the men in it) increases when women have a relatively strong position. This also applies in cases where the man migrates to the city in order to improve the family income.

Women's rights also include their sexual self-determination and reproductive health. One third of all illnesses affecting women of childbearing age are due to problems of sexual and reproductive health. To tackle this situation, women-oriented health care is required and pregnancy and birth must be made safer (cf. Section 4 on social security). It is equally important to ensure that women have a genuine right to self-determination so that they also have a say in family planning. Of course this also requires access to modern contraceptive methods and the necessary information.

Welthungerhilfe's involvement in relation to empowering women:

Gender justice is a crosscutting issue, i.e. in all Welthungerhilfe supported projects and programmes the effects on the situation of women and gender justice issues will be taken into consideration. This applies wherever possible, from situation analysis and project planning through implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

Strengthening women's role as (agricultural) producers.

Enabling women to participate in political and social decision-making processes and to speak up for their own interests.

Supporting women's networks and countering discrimination against women.

Taking into account women's particular needs e.g. in relation to their budgeting of time, cultural factors (e.g. in relation to travelling) or the necessity of childcare. This explicitly includes planning and provision of necessary materials and funding.

Applying principles of gender equality to staff appointment to positions in projects and programmes (e.g. women as trainers).

Ensuring that activities in project work do not simply result in additional work for women. The aim is to make women's working days easier.

Welcoming the improvement of gender equality through the application of quotas.

Welthungerhilfe's demands in relation to gender equality and equality for women:

Targeting support for women in countries affected by hunger.

Giving priority to investment in women's education and health in the context of combating poverty.

Strengthening women's political and social participation as well as their economic integration.

Working to decisively reduce gender-based differences of access to education, health, markets, land, economic and natural resources and political bodies.

Developing countries must ensure that there are no laws on the books that are discriminatory against women. This is particularly important in relation to marital and family law, the law of inheritance and the right to own or use land and capital.

This section is an excerpt of the WHH Position Paper Rural Development. Please also consult all other sections at www.welthungerhilfe.org/position-paper-rural-development

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