

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

# GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Edited by Melissa Leach

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# GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For pathways to be truly sustainable and advance gender equality and the rights and capabilities of women and girls, those whose lives and wellbeing are at stake must be involved in leading the way.

*Gender Equality and Sustainable Development* calls for policies, investments and initiatives in sustainable development that recognize women's knowledge, agency and decision-making as fundamental. Four key sets of issues – work and industrial production; population and reproduction; food and agriculture; and water, sanitation and energy provide focal lenses through which these challenges are considered. Perspectives from new feminist political ecology and economy are integrated alongside issues of rights, relations and power. The book untangles the complex interactions between different dimensions of gender relations and sustainability, and explores how policy and activism can build synergies between them. Finally, this book demonstrates how plural pathways are possible, underpinned by different narratives about gender and sustainability, and how the choices between them are ultimately political.

This timely book will be of great interest to students, scholars, practitioners and policy makers working on gender, sustainable development, development studies and ecological economics.

**Melissa Leach** is Director of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK. Between 2006 and 2014 she directed the ESRC STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre.

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'Melissa Leach has brought together an outstanding team of practitioners and researchers to produce a crisply written and engaging review of the interlinkages among gender, environment and sustainable development. The forward-looking collection both challenges unsustainable pathways and charts new ones. A must read for all those working in the field of sustainable development.'

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'This is an excellent volume, with both range and depth. It not only brings an essential gender perspective to the issue of sustainable development, but also highlights the insufficiency of recognising women's contributions without providing them resources and voice. The lucid introduction, with its reflections on past and current debates, and on alternative pathways, is a significant contribution in itself.'

*Bina Agarwal, Professor of Development Economics and Environment,  
University of Manchester, UK*

'This timely book provides innovative and exciting ideas for both scholars and policy makers, challenging dominant market-led development models. It shows how pathways to achieve sustainable development and gender equality can be built through women's collective action at the grassroots and supportive public investment and services.'

*Diane Elson, Emeritus Professor, University of Essex, UK*

'This astute group of critical observers and participants dare to question the dominant narratives of capitalism, sustainability and development as well as facile gender and development formulas. They reiterate the critical feminist question "Sustaining what for whom?" and acknowledge the political choices embodied in green technologies, green economies and the feminization of planetary care work.'

*Dianne Rocheleau, Professor of Geography, Clark University, USA*

# GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

*Edited by Melissa Leach*

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# PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The twin challenges of building pathways to sustainable development and enhancing gender equality have never been more pressing. This book shows why each is so important, but also why they must be addressed together, and how this might be done.

And this is a timely moment. As the world moves towards defining and implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 era, there is much talk of integration – of environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability; of goals around climate change, water, food and land, health and reproduction, and other issues; and, with these, of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. But what does integration mean in practice, and how might it be achieved? In this book we offer an approach to these questions centred on the concept of pathways to sustainability, informed by feminist thinking around rights, relations and power. The book untangles the complex interactions between different dimensions of gender relations and of sustainability, and explores how policy and activism can build synergies between them. But further, it shows how plural pathways are possible, underpinned by different narratives about gender and sustainability, and how the choices between these are ultimately political.

Too often, discussions and action around gender and the environment have followed simplistic stereotypes that focus narrowly on women's roles, and assume them to be either victims or 'sustainability saviours'. These past tendencies have recently been brought to life again in the context of policy concerns with climate change, 'planetary boundaries' and green economies. In chapters focusing on work and industrial production; population and reproduction; food and agriculture; and water, sanitation and energy, the book's authors challenge and move beyond these stereotypes. They analyse the varied interactions between gender relations as intersected by other differences such as class, ethnicity and place, and different views of sustainability, asking 'sustainability of what, for whom'? They explore

how gendered livelihoods, work and control of resources – but also identities, bodily integrity, dignity and knowledge – are implicated in pathways to sustainability – or otherwise. Revealed are tensions and trade-offs, and some powerful ways in which dominant market-led development models and policy approaches lead to both gender inequality and unsustainability. But the reverse is also possible: gender equality and sustainability can powerfully reinforce each other in alternative pathways. Women's knowledge, agency and collective action are often central to these, whether in managing local landscapes, adapting to climate change, producing and accessing food, or securing sustainable water, sanitation and energy services.

Drawing from these illustrations, the book calls for policies, investments and initiatives in sustainable development that recognize women's knowledge, agency and decision-making as fundamental. Such gender-equitable approaches can improve resource productivity and efficiency, and enhance ecosystem conservation and sustainable use. They can also build fairer and greener economies, and more sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient food, energy, water and sanitation, and health systems. Ultimately, for pathways to be truly sustainable and to advance gender equality and the rights and capabilities of women and girls, the book argues that those whose lives and wellbeing are at stake must be involved in leading the way, through community groups, women's organizations and other forms of collective action; through appropriate forms of investment and public services; and through fostering a linked, progressive politics of both gender and sustainability.

The book emerged from discussions and background papers originally commissioned by UN Women to inform its 2014 World Survey on the Role of Women in Economic Development. In a series of workshops and informal interactions, chapter authors – from different disciplinary, theoretical and sectoral backgrounds, yet sharing a commitment to engaged feminist scholarship – agreed that a common book-length project was both valuable and timely. The process of putting it together has been exciting and rewarding. As Editor I owe deep thanks to UN Women for its initial catalytic role and subsequent support, as well as to the chapter authors for their endeavour and collaborative spirit – it has been a pleasure and a privilege to work together, and a nice example of international feminist networking.

The book's overall conceptualization and individual chapter drafts have benefited greatly from others' comments and insights, both at the World Survey Expert Group meetings in New York and Rome in 2013–14, and in written reviews and informal interactions. Amongst others, particular thanks are owed to Bina Agarwal, Peter Alstone, Wendy Harcourt, Andrew Fischer, Stacy Jackson, Saraswathi Menon, Marjorie Mbilinyi, Mohan Rao, Liane Schalatek, Stephanie Seguino, Gita Sen, Libor Stloukal and Simon Thuo for their inputs to particular chapters or overall. We gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of anonymous reviewers, while several chapters benefited from excellent research assistance, including from Senti Sojwal and Jessa Orluk (Chapter 3) and Tanya Kar and Larissa Ushizima (Chapter 4).

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Melissa Leach  
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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
AoA	Agreement on Agriculture (WTO)
BC	black carbon
BPO	business process outsourcing
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CLTS	community-led total sanitation
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPE	feminist political ecology
GAD	gender and development
GED	gender, environment and development
GMO	genetically modified organism
GVC	global value chain
HAP	household air pollution
HDI	Human Development Index
HGU	land-use concessions ( <i>Hak Guna Usaha</i> )
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
ICN	International Conference on Nutrition
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development

ICTSD	International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	international financial institution
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT/ITES	information technology and services
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LPG	liquefied petroleum gas
MARA	Malthusian Anticipatory Regime for Africa
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MMR	maternal mortality ratio
MWC	Mahindra World City
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movements (India)
NEP	National Electrification Program (South Africa)
NFPE	new feminist political ecology
NISP	National Improved Stoves Program
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
PPP	public–private partnership
SC/STs	scheduled castes and tribes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SIE	semi-industrialized economy
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
TFR	total fertility rate
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-REDD	United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WANTO	Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations
WCD	World Commission on Dams

**xviii** Acronyms and abbreviations

WED	women, environment and development
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WFS	World Food Summit
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	women in development
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
WiRES	Women in Renewable Energy Sector project
WOW	Wider Opportunities for Women
WTO	World Trade Organization

# 1

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### A gendered pathways approach

*Melissa Leach, Lyla Mehta and Preetha Prabhakaran*

#### Introduction

Women in Kenya struggle to produce crops to feed their families amidst drying climates and insecure land tenure, on holdings diminished by private sector ‘land grabs’.

In many villages and cities, vital work to care for the people who sustain economies and societies is compromised and rendered more difficult, because the basic water, sanitation, health and energy services needed aren’t within reach.

Environmental and economic problems are blamed on population growth and the ‘excessive fertility’ of women – especially in Africa – encouraging a resurgence of coercive policies that undermine their bodily integrity and control.

Forest user groups in India with strong women’s involvement render landscapes greener and richer in biodiversity and climate mitigation potential, while also satisfying vital needs for livelihoods, food and fuel.

Waste picker networks with women at their heart combine livelihoods with ‘green’ circular economies both in their communities and through upscaling into global networks.

Vignettes like these highlight vital interconnections between gender, environment and development. Environmental degradation has different impacts on women and men. Development patterns that neglect everyday environmental and economic needs can worsen women’s positions, but so can environment and development discourses that target women inappropriately. Yet in an era when development is becoming sustainable development, women are also leading the way in new practices that combine environmental, economic and social goals. This book

highlights the vital synergies between sustainable development and gender equality, but also the need for transformational change if negative interactions are to be averted and positive pathways built.

Accelerating sustainable development, and enhancing gender equality are both current imperatives in research, policy and public debate. Too often, however, they are addressed separately. This book's central argument is that they need to be integrated in both understandings and practices, in ways that appreciate the diversity of women's and men's experiences and contexts. Pursuing either sustainability or gender equality without attention to the other is doomed to failure on practical, moral and political grounds; the challenge, therefore, is to find pathways that build synergies between these concerns, towards sustainable and just futures for all. But how is this to be done, and by whom? How are gender equality, sustainability and their interlinkages to be understood, and how might the challenge of integrating them be addressed? The chapters that follow take up these questions in relation to a variety of issues and settings across the world. In this chapter, we introduce the overall arguments, definitions and conceptual approaches that inform and unite these contributions.

Our starting point is glaring evidence that dominant patterns of production, consumption and distribution are heading in deeply unsustainable directions. In a world in which humanity has become a key driver of Earth system processes, we are seeing over-exploitation of natural resources, the loss of key habitats and biodiversity, and pollution of land, seas and the atmosphere. Scientific understandings are clarifying the huge social, environmental and economic challenges posed by threats such as climate change and loss of essential ecosystem services, as humanity approaches or exceeds so-called 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al, 2009a; IPCC, 2013; Steffen et al, 2015). Already, human interactions with the environment are producing unprecedented shocks and stresses, felt in floods, droughts, and devastated urban and rural landscapes and livelihoods, while many people and places have suffered from a 'nexus' of food, energy, environmental and financial crises. These unsustainable patterns add to poverty and inequality today – especially for the third of the world's population directly dependent on natural resources for their wellbeing (Unmüßig et al, 2012) – and create deep threats for future generations. And their effects often intensify gender inequality.

The causes and underlying drivers of unsustainability and of gender inequality are deeply interlocked. Both, we argue, are produced by political-economic relations in late capitalism that support particular types of neoliberal, market-led growth. These involve extreme privatization, financialization and concentration of capital; production geared to short-term profits; unfettered material consumption; and unprecedented levels of militarism – very often at the expense of state regulation and redistribution, reproduction and care. These political-economic relations rely on and reproduce gender inequalities, exploiting women's labour and provision of unpaid care, and often their bodies too. They are leading, in many settings, to crises of social reproduction, while undermining people's rights and dignity. The same political-economic relations also produce environmental problems, as market

actors seek and secure profit in ways that rely on the over-exploitation of natural resources and the pollution of climates, land and oceans. Such market-led pathways are leading in directions that are unsustainable in social and ecological terms, and ultimately in economic terms too, undermining the conditions for future progress.

Growing international attention and debate now highlight the need to move economies and societies onto more sustainable paths, whether to avert crisis and catastrophe, or enable prosperity through 'green economies'. Yet often missing in these debates is a sense of the politics involved. The challenge is often seen in technical and managerial terms, as a matter of getting the technologies, prices and regulations right. This overlooks the more profound restructuring of social, economic and political systems that we may require to transform unsustainable patterns. Equally, 'sustainability' is often presented as if it were a clear, uncontested term. Yet many tensions and trade-offs arise: for instance between finance for different kinds of low-carbon energy; between prioritizing food or biofuels in land use, or forests for carbon to mitigate global climate change or to meet local livelihood needs, to name a few. How such tensions are addressed has profound implications for who gains and loses – amongst social groups, and between local, national and global interests. Thus sustainability is a normative and contested term: we must constantly ask 'sustainability of what for whom' (Leach et al, 2010). As this book shows, many instances of policy and intervention today promote sustainability or green economy goals in ways that create tension with, or undermine, women's rights and gender equality.

Yet this is also a time of opportunity. Examples are accumulating around the world of alternative pathways that move towards sustainability and gender equality, uniting these in powerful synergies. Some are rooted in the everyday practices through which women and men access, control, use and manage forests, soils and urban landscapes in ways that sustain livelihoods and wellbeing. Others are evident in movements and collectives, many led by women, to build alternative food and resource sovereignty, agro-ecology, urban transitions or solidarity economies. While some of these offer alternatives or modifications within current capitalist relations, others suggest routes to more profound 'green transformations' (Scoones et al, 2015).

Integrating gender equality and sustainable development is therefore vital for several reasons. First, this is a moral and ethical imperative: building more equitable gender relations that support the human rights, dignity and capabilities of all women and men, intersected by differences of class, race, sexuality, age, ability and circumstances, is a central requirement of an ethical world order. Second, an integrated approach is vital to avoid women becoming victims, redressing the all-too-common pattern whereby women suffer most from environmental, climatic and economic shocks and stresses, undermining their vital roles in sustaining their families and communities. But third, and most significantly, an integrated approach offers opportunities to build on people's agency. Attention to gender offers routes to improve resource productivity and efficiency; to enhance ecosystem conservation and sustainable use, and to build more sustainable, low-carbon food, energy, water

and health systems. Not just victims, the chapters in this book show how women have been, and can be, central actors in pathways to sustainability and green transformation. Yet, crucially, this must not mean adding ‘environment’ to women’s caring roles, or instrumentalizing women as the new ‘sustainability saviours’. It means recognition and respect for their knowledge, rights, capabilities and bodily integrity, and ensuring that roles are matched with rights and control over resources and decision-making power.

Gender equality and sustainable development can thus reinforce each other in powerful ways (see Agarwal, 2002; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2002; Johnsson-Latham, 2007; UNDP, 2012). Charting what pathways that reinforce gender equality and sustainable development together might look like, and how they might be built, are the central aims of this book. Five key sets of issues provide focal lenses through which the book’s chapters consider these challenges. Thus Elissa Braunstein and Mimi Houston explore work and industrial production (Chapter 2); Betsy Hartmann, Anne Hendrixson and Jade Sasser consider population and reproduction (Chapter 3); Sakiko Fukuda-Parr addresses food security and agriculture (Chapter 4); Michael Levien takes up the related question of land rights and ‘grabs’ (Chapter 5), and Isha Ray examines everyday innovations around water, sanitation and energy (Chapter 6). These issues have been chosen – amongst many possibilities – because each illustrates ‘troubling intersections’ between dominant development pathways, (un)sustainability and gender (in)equality; each highlights the importance of a range of rights that are key to gender equality, from those involved with bare life and survival to those linked with voice, power and dignity; and each reveals contestation and debate between problematic narratives and pathways, and alternatives that offer pathways to sustainable development and gender equality.

The chapter authors are all eminent scholars and experts in the particular fields and issues they address. They come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds – including anthropology, economics, politics and technology studies – and a variety of positions in gender, development and feminist debates. These differences are reflected in the focus and analytical style of their particular chapters. Yet all share a broad political commitment to greater gender equality and a more sustainable and just world. This sense of the politics involved and their importance, as well as a desire to collaborate to produce a coherent set of analyses of gendered pathways to sustainability, was reinforced during a series of workshops and exchanges during 2013–14. These were hosted by UN Women, the United Nations entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to inform the preparation of the 2014 World Survey on the Role of Women in Economic Development (UN Women, 2014). While several of the book’s chapters originated as background papers from which the report drew material, the analysis and arguments developed during these dialogues went far beyond what a UN report could hope to include. Shahrashoub Razavi and Seemin Qayum (Chapter 7) reflect on these issues of inclusion and translation, as an exemplar of the wider challenges of bringing a feminist political perspective to bear on sustainable development debates. Meanwhile, this book emerged as a collective effort to present a deeper set of

contributions that, together, could demonstrate the importance of building pathways to sustainability and gender equality.

The dialogues that led to this book shared and developed a common set of definitions and approaches to gender equality, sustainability and their interlinkages. Central to these is a 'gendered pathways approach'. Building on the pathways approach developed by the STEPS Centre as a guide to thinking and action around sustainability challenges in a complex, dynamic world (Leach et al, 2010), this offers a conceptual framework for addressing the intersections, tensions and trade-offs between different dimensions of gender and of sustainability. The gendered pathways approach offers guidelines for analysing current pathways of change, and imagining and appraising alternatives.

The next two sections of this chapter introduce these core concepts in general terms, indicating their broad relevance for understanding the interlocking of gender (in)equality and (un)sustainability in pathways related to work, population, food, land, water and energy – thus introducing core themes dealt with in detail in subsequent chapters. The chapters themselves all apply this conceptual approach and illustrate it in action, although to different extents and in different ways, as befits their authors' focal issues and perspectives.

Tracing interlinkages between gender and sustainability is nothing new, however. The subsequent section reviews how diverse concepts – or narratives – about women, gender and sustainability have emerged and come to co-exist. Tracing shifting sustainability debates from colonial times to the present, we consider how and to what extent gender has been conceptualized, and the gendered outcomes of sustainability-focused policies and programmes. This includes a review of gender thinking – and silences – in current approaches to climate change, green economies and planetary boundaries. As it shows, powerful narratives have sometimes worked to hide or misrepresent gender-sustainability linkages. In the name of environmental protection, women have sometimes been dispossessed from their lands, forests and water resources. Women's roles as so-called 'carers' of nature have sometimes been essentialized, making women responsible for environmental chores that draw on their voluntary labour – in narratives that cast them as 'sustainability saviours'. Revisiting a longer history of sustainability thinking and feminist scholarship highlights problems to avoid and potentials to build on in developing a fully gendered pathways approach.

Building on this review, we go on to elaborate the gendered pathways approach more fully, drawing particularly on insights from feminist political economy, feminist political ecology, and studies of gendered subjectivities and embodiment. We also emphasize the significance of tensions and trade-offs in different pathways. Some will promote sustainability at the cost of gender equality; some may promote gender equality and neglect key dimensions of sustainability. Since pathways are dynamic, they can also have unintended social, technological and environmental consequences which effect gendered outcomes. Negotiating such dynamics requires inclusive learning and deliberation processes and ways to monitor



exclusions, trade-offs and emerging opportunities, as well as ongoing awareness of the complex politics of both gender and sustainability.

The final section addresses the policy and political challenges of transforming pathways towards greater gender equality and sustainability. Strengthening and refining public policies and investments is key; but beyond and complementing these lies scope to build gender-progressive alliances between public and private actors, state and civil society institutions, and formal and informal practices. Ultimately, feminist movements and collective organizing, emerging in diverse ways and places across the world, may offer the greatest hope both for challenging unsustainable pathways and charting new ones that lead us in more sustainable, gender-equal directions.

### **Conceptualizing sustainable development, gender equality and pathways**

Sustainability, and sustainable development, are historically changing and much debated concepts. Since the 1990s, mainstream views have generally defined sustainability in normative terms, to refer to a broadly identifiable set of social, environmental and economic values. Our definition is broadly in line with the view, since Brundtland (1987, p43), that sustainable development should ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. This involves integrating three ‘pillars’ of sustainability: environmental, economic and social. Yet we go beyond these broad emphases in several important ways. First, we emphasize the need to be more specific about the values and goals at stake around different issues and contexts, across temporal and spatial scales, and according to the perspectives and priorities of different groups. Thus there may be multiple possible sustainabilities at stake, and negotiating these is a political, not just a technical and managerial, challenge. Second, in such negotiations, the social dimensions of sustainability – too often played down or ignored – must be fully integrated. And third, we must attend to equity not just across generations, but within them. Here gender equity and equality are central.

In this book, then, sustainable development is development that ensures human wellbeing, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice, now and in the future.

Pursuing sustainable development for all requires upholding human rights principles, widening freedoms and promoting peace – in combination with respect for the environment. It requires redressing discrimination and disadvantage at household, local, national, regional and global levels.

This in turn requires redirecting interconnected environmental, economic, social and political processes, challenging current unsustainable pathways of production, consumption and distribution and finding new ones. It requires action and accountability by the state, civil society, the private sector, communities and individuals, building alliances to transform institutions and power relations, and to democratize knowledge.

In this conceptualization, gender equality is therefore integral to how sustainable development is defined and pursued. We consider gender equality in relation not just to women and men, but also to the ways that gender intersects with class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, place and other significant axes of difference. The concept of substantive gender equality emphasizes the importance of human rights, capabilities and the ways these intertwine and overlap (Goldblatt and McLean, 2011; Vizard et al, 2011). Building on this, we recognize multiple dimensions to pursuing gender equality. They include first, redressing socio-economic disadvantage in the domains of work, wellbeing and access to resources. This encompasses ensuring equal access to decent work and secure livelihoods; the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work; equal access to quality education, health and other social services and public goods; and equal access to and control over resources and their benefits – including ecosystem-based resources. A second dimension is enhancing recognition and dignity. This includes challenging stereotypes around masculinity and femininity; assuring freedom from violence and violations of dignity and security; assuring bodily integrity and sexual and reproductive health and rights; and recognition and respect for diverse forms of knowledge production and application. Third, greater gender equality means enhancing equal participation in decision-making at multiple levels. This includes supporting agency, power and voice in institutions and decision-making; building deliberative forms of democracy that can debate sustainability goals and values in inclusive ways; and assuring space for feminist collective action.

Gender equality ultimately requires the realization of all human rights. In relation to work, we see the importance of women's rights to decent employment and livelihoods, and the significance of multiple rights while at work (see Chapter 2). In relation to population, we see the importance of assuring sexual and reproductive rights, as well as rights to freedom from violence and coercion (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 on food and agriculture highlight the right to food, as well as the importance of rights to land and natural resources in order to produce it. In relation to water, sanitation and energy, we see the importance of the right to water and sanitation as well as rights to basic infrastructure and services, and their vital links to rights to bodily integrity, dignity and security (Chapter 6). Yet in each of these areas, different kinds of rights and capabilities overlap and reinforce each other. Rights on their own are often not enough; making them real also requires recognition and respect (Fraser, 2013), power and voice, and challenges to dominant institutions and forms of knowledge. It is here that we see the critical role of collective action and women's mobilization in challenging stereotypes, making states accountable for the realization of rights, and in providing alternatives.

Our pathways approach helps in conceptualizing how institutions, power and knowledge can interact to create and sustain pathways that are either unsustainable, or – alternatively – that offer routes to sustainable development. Pathways are alternative directions of intervention and change. They refer to the ways that 'systems' or assemblages of social, political, economic, institutional, ecological and technological processes, interacting in dynamic ways in particular environments,

might develop over time (Leach et al, 2010). Such systems operate at different scales. Thus a local example might be the interactions of land and tree ecologies, gender divisions of labour and responsibility, and cooking technologies involved in fuelwood use. Nationally, we might be concerned with the interactions of state policies and markets involved in food systems. And a global example might be the interactions of dynamic climate processes with international regulation, carbon market schemes, and finance aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions and impacts. Yet most sustainability challenges involve interactions across scales. Thus we might be concerned with the impacts of global climate processes on local land ecologies and uses, or with the ways that household, state and market institutions interact to shape the dynamics of food access. Pathways might involve systems moving in unsustainable directions or, alternatively, towards sustainable development.

Central to the pathways approach is to recognize that there are multiple ways of understanding and representing – or ‘framing’ – systems and change. Issues such as which scale is important, which processes are highlighted, the nature of problems and possible solutions, and which goals or dimensions of sustainability to highlight, can all be framed in different ways. Different actors – whether different local people, scientific, policy or business actors – will often hold different views depending on their particular backgrounds, perspectives, interests and values, and such framings often become part of narratives, or storylines, about a problem or issue, why it matters and what is to be done (Roe, 1995). ‘Labelling’ of particular people and groups – as responsible for the problem, or key to the solution – is often part and parcel of this.

Most sustainability issues involve multiple, contested framings and narratives. Thus, for example, environmental problems may be attributed to rising populations in Malthusian narratives that blame women’s excessive fertility; or alternatively as the result of political–economic processes that lead to poverty–related resource degradation (see Chapter 3). Food sustainability challenges may be framed as problems of production, to be solved by new agricultural technologies and enhanced markets; or alternatively in terms of distribution, access and entitlements (Chapter 4). Different narratives, as we shall see, implicate and label gender and women in highly contrasting ways. The point is that not all narratives are equal; some dominate, supported by powerful institutions and relations, while others remain marginalized or hidden. And narratives have material consequences: they underpin and legitimate particular policies, institutions, interventions and patterns of investment, while excluding others.

The pathways approach thus highlights the narratives, institutions and political–economic processes that shape pathways towards, or away from, sustainable development and gender equality. It highlights the multiplicity of possible narratives and pathways in any setting, the tensions between these, and the importance of looking beneath the dominant ‘motorways’ to recognize and validate alternatives – the bush paths or faint footprints of the global development scene.

## Pathways of (un)sustainable development and gender (in)equality

It is increasingly clear that dominant pathways of development are unsustainable in economic, social and environmental terms. The decades since the 1950s have seen huge growth across many indicators of production and consumption (Steffen et al, 2004). Since 1950 the global economy has increased by more than a factor of 15, and real world gross domestic product (GDP) grew from US\$2 trillion in 1965 to US\$28 trillion in 1995 (UNDP, 2000; UNEP, 2000; Steffen et al, 2004). This has depended, for the most part, on a development model focused on market-led economic growth under late capitalism. This is supported by powerful narratives, deeply entrenched amongst many international agencies and market actors, in which economic growth is the core goal, and market-led approaches the best way to achieve it. Such narratives have co-developed with patterns of production and consumption generally geared to increasing monetary accumulation. Hyper-consumption and materialistic lifestyles are encouraged. Neoliberal policies and logics emphasize the pursuit of private profits by firms and individuals, in markets left as free as possible from state involvement. Business competition and free trade are encouraged nationally, regionally and globally, but monopolistic practices are left largely uncurbed. There is increased financialization of many resources and sectors of the economy – and trade and speculation in those financialized resources. While there is obviously variation between countries, regions and sectors, much has been variation within the broad parameters of this kind of market-oriented, neoliberal growth model.

Increasingly, though, the economic sustainability of such pathways is in question. Financial crises and recession, taking hold in many countries and sending shock-waves around a globalized world, have laid bare the risks and vulnerabilities, bubble-like and boom-bust tendencies inherent to financialized market models, which undermine their viability even on their own terms. The fruits of this growth have also been deeply unequal. As GDP has grown, the economic disparities between countries and regions and within individual societies have increased. The poorest 20 per cent of the world's population control only 2 per cent of global income (Unmüßig et al, 2012), while the world's most rapidly growing economies – including the rising powers of Asia, South Africa and Latin America – have also seen rapid rises in inequality (Piketty, 2014). Inequality itself threatens economic sustainability, fuelling unrest and conflict, and undermining the stability, level playing field and consumer demand on which growth relies (Stiglitz, 2012).

Many dominant market-led pathways are also socially and environmentally unsustainable. Indeed mainstream growth-focused models frequently rely on, and thus perpetuate, both gender inequality, and pollution and over-exploitation of the environment. In terms of gender, a central dynamic includes reliance on a separation between productive and reproductive labour – the latter including unpaid and volunteer labour for care, subsistence and reproduction, much of it carried out by women. While productive labour is valued, capitalist pressures often force wages

down. Growth in many areas of industry and commercial agriculture has unfolded along with a feminization of labour. While economic globalization has created employment opportunities for women across various classes, many of these have been provided within and reproduce patterns of discrimination and segregation that are embedded within labour markets. Thus poorer women undertake work that is seen to be an extension of their traditional gender roles, in low-end retail jobs, domestic service, assembly lines and labour-intensive agricultural work. Such jobs tend to be characterized by low wages, instability of employment, and poor working conditions. Many are informal. They reinforce the status of women as secondary earners within their households, and may remain invisible within the economic system.

Even more significantly, capitalist markets and production can continue to function as they do only because they constantly make use of unpaid labour, mostly by women, in caring for children, the sick and the elderly. Nancy Folbre argues that market economies are sustained not by the 'invisible hand of the market' alone, but also by the 'invisible heart of care' (Folbre, 2001). The nature of work that underlies care and the fact that it is unpaid often essentializes women as care-givers. Women's obligation to fulfil these socially prescribed roles not only places burden and stress on them, but also limits their opportunities, capabilities and choices to participate in paid employment outside the home, with negative consequences for their rights, dignity and status. This care work, which is essential to reproduce both the labour force and the wider communities and societies in which they are embedded, is consistently ignored, undervalued or 'externalized' in capitalist economic models. Gender inequality is therefore a constitutive element of this dominant development model, and reinforced through it. However, by eroding values of care and social security, and by over-exploiting human 'capital', this model risks becoming socially unsustainable; indeed there is growing evidence of an emerging crisis of social reproduction.

In ecological terms, people and their activities have become the dominant drivers of change in the 'anthropocene' (Steffen et al, 2004). Mainstream models of capitalist growth rely on the exploitation of natural resources as if they were unlimited, and on 'externalizing' the environmental costs of production – such as pollution and the release of greenhouse gases. Competitive pressures have led firms and market actors to a relentless search for economic efficiencies at the expense of nature. Economic incentives, technologies, infrastructures and political institutions have often combined to create and 'lock in' pathways that create profit at environmental expense – whether the entrenched fossil fuel systems that dominate energy supplies while creating carbon emissions and climate change, or commercial agricultural schemes that create short-term gain by over-exploiting soils and water supplies. Such pathways are unsustainable in their own terms, threatening to run up against resource limits that will undermine future production and consumption. They threaten the integrity of ecosystems, damaging water, soil, biodiversity, vegetation and air, reducing their life-supporting capacities, resilience and robustness. Declines in ecosystem services and productive capacity undermine

people's livelihoods and health in the present, and threaten future generations. Local ecosystem degradation often interacts with global threats and processes, for instance in climate and ocean systems, resulting in shocks and stresses such as floods and droughts that damage further both ecosystems and the people and activities that depend on them.

By ignoring social and ecological limits to growth, the political economy of market-led growth and the narratives that underpin it thereby destroys its own living foundations – humans and nature – through over-exploitation (Wichterich, 2012). The capitalist market economy drives a constantly intensifying use of human, social and natural resources, in a vicious cycle in which hyper-resource extraction, production and consumption reinforce each other. In order to increase profits, capitalist production shifts social and ecological costs onto private households and local communities, or onto nature, along pathways that rely on and perpetuate gender inequality. In this process, local ways of living with environments in socially and ecologically sustainable ways – whether in rural or urban settings, amongst pastoralist, agricultural or forest communities – are often ignored or undermined, along with gendered local knowledge of ecologies and ways to manage them.

The costs and consequences of environmental change are also felt in gendered ways that can further fuel inequality. Disasters, including those related to climate change, often disproportionately affect poor women (Neumayer and Plumper, 2007). Women often bear the brunt of coping with climate-related shocks and stresses, or the health effects of urban pollution, adding to their care burdens. As land and forest resources once held in common are increasingly enclosed, privatized or 'grabbed' for commercial investment, so poorer women and indigenous people, who often depend on these places to produce and gather food and fuel for subsistence and incomes, find themselves marginalized and their livelihoods, rights and status further undermined. As scarcities of land, food, energy and water – created by their privatization and over-exploitation in competitive markets – interact and intensify, the resulting 'nexus' of pressures is also felt in gender-differentiated ways. Women often struggle to sustain livelihoods under more constrained conditions, adding to their care burdens and threatening their health and status.

As policy-makers and businesses seek to respond to environmental change within a market model, nature and ecosystems are increasingly commoditized and financialized, so that their carbon, biodiversity and other ecosystem services can be traded in markets, payment and offset schemes. While such schemes aim to 'put a proper price' on natural capital, so that it can be included within rather than externalized from economic calculations, the resulting markets have often proved to work against the interests of the poor and women, and have further intensified resource pressures, land, water and green 'grabs' (Fairhead et al, 2012; Mehta et al, 2012).

The rise and character of militarism adds a further dimension to pathways of unsustainability and gender inequality. The financial, political and policy relationships that link government agencies, armies and the industrial base that

supports them – the so-called military–industrial complex – is a pervasive feature of late capitalism. Spending on defence dwarfs that on social or environmental investments in most countries. Concerns with national military security and defence encourage environmental change to be addressed in terms of its threats to national security – as when climate change is seen to create problematic environmental refugee flows across borders, or armed conflict is attributed to resource scarcity. This military ‘securitization’ takes attention, policy and investment away from the social, and gender-related, causes and impacts of environmental change. Meanwhile, military interventions are often associated with the perpetuation of violence in ways that rely on and entrench patriarchal values, and often damage women’s rights, dignity and bodily integrity.

Such troubling intersections, or mutually reinforcing pathways, between unsustainability and gender inequality are evident in each of the chapters in this book. Yet the chapters also reveal how powerful narratives have often obscured such troubling intersections, hiding them under a gloss that market-oriented growth models can continue unproblematically, and need only to be implemented with greater force. Thus Chapter 2, on work, elaborates on the fundamental political–economic interactions between global growth and economic competitiveness, and the exploitation of women’s labour through low wages and reliance on unpaid care. With a focus on industrial production, the chapter shows how this dynamic has played out in varied ways across sectors and in different countries, but has tended to produce both financial unsustainability and gender inequality.

Chapter 3, on population, shows the continued – and indeed renewed – dominance of Malthusian narratives that attribute environmental degradation and ecological threats to growing populations. This conveniently detracts attention from – and thus supports the continuation of – political–economic processes and relations that are actually far more significant in producing environmental problems than are sheer numbers of people. The chapter also shows the interconnections between neoliberalism and the rolling back of the state, and the rise of political economies and policies that treat women as self-disciplining reproductive subjects, blaming them for problems such as rising population growth, without support for – and often undermining – their rights, dignity and control over their bodies. It reveals interconnections between rising militarism and violence to both women and environments.

Chapter 4, on food, illustrates how systemic dynamics in the global economy and markets are intersecting with gender relations to have deleterious consequences for both household food security and gender equality. Yet dominant narratives – in this case the productionist focus that has dominated much international thinking and policy since the 1980s – marginalize questions of food rights and access. Focusing on these questions, the chapter shows how the volatility of world cereal markets and the operation of global value chains are interacting with gender-specific constraints around resource rights, access and control. Women farmers are central in producing food for their families and in sustaining the ecologies that

enable this, but must often do so under increasingly constrained conditions. Meanwhile, in some settings food distribution within households works against women and girls. Gender relations, the chapter shows, are key to the distributional patterns and pathways that shape who gets access to food and adequate nutrition, and who goes hungry. They also shape the environmental sustainability, or otherwise, of the pathways involved in food production and access. Levien (Chapter 5) adds to the debate by exploring the gendered nature of dispossession from land, water and forest resources due to the different dimensions of land grabs, where the actions of powerful domestic and international players (often in cooperation with the state) lead to the marginalization of already powerless women and men. Thus the chapters bring to light the crucial, yet too often underplayed, intersections between prevailing political economies and the production of unsustainability and gender inequality.

Yet alternative pathways that move in sustainable directions – economically, socially and environmentally – are possible. They are underpinned by alternative narratives that emphasize not just profit and growth, but the importance of sustainability, inclusivity and social justice. Typically, these pathways do not rely solely on markets; instead they involve different combinations of public, private and civil society action and institutions. Social movements are key in initiating and demanding these pathways, and shaping forms of collective action that maintain them. And states play central roles – in providing appropriate policy contexts, regulating standards and resource use, holding private actors to account, and providing public services and investments crucial to social and ecological sustainability.

Thus, in relation to work, we see new public and private alliances pushing for and building green economies and green transformations (Chapter 2). Here pathways are emerging that link financing, technologies, and investments in areas such as renewable energy and waste recycling to styles of growth that respect ecological limits. Others, questioning whether continued high growth rates and market systems can ever be sustainable, are pioneering alternative pathways around ideas of sufficiency, solidarity and wellbeing.

In relation to food (Chapter 4), we see pathways emerging that focus on securing the right to food. These include policy and public support for needs-oriented smallholder farming, enabling people to secure ecologically sound cultivation, maintain soil fertility and ensure their livelihoods. Successful pathways often incorporate local knowledge of ecological conditions, soils and seeds, cooperatives for production and marketing, and support such as credit to enable poorer farmers to access appropriate inputs. Pathways to support food access and rights also benefit from state interventions, for instance in setting minimum wages, labour market policies and price regulation, and negotiating internationally around issues such as export subsidies and the maintenance of reserve stocks to offset price volatility. Social movements are campaigning actively for such structural changes to the political economy of food, while demonstrating alternative pathways centred on local food system autonomy and sustainable agro-ecological practices.



Chapter 6, on investments, highlights pathways through which the poorest people can secure rights to products and services that meet essential everyday needs – for water, sanitation and clean cooking. These bring vital benefits both in environmental sustainability and in enhancing people’s capabilities, dignity and health. Public investment is key to such pathways. But so too is innovation to find appropriate water, sanitation and stove technologies and attune them to local social and ecological conditions. The role of local knowledge and grassroots innovation and action therefore proves fundamental for these pathways too. The challenge is then to scale-up equitably, maintaining a focus on gender justice and sustainability, and here state and public policy interventions are key.

Women’s agency is central to many of these alternative, sustainable pathways. Women are often at the forefront of social movements resisting unsustainable pathways and demanding alternatives. Their knowledge, action and agency are central to finding, demonstrating and building more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable ways to manage local ecologies, adapt to climate change, produce and access food, and secure sustainable, appropriate water, sanitation and energy services. Increasingly, women’s centrality is recognized in policy and politics. Thus governments and donor agencies target women as key in community adaptation to climate change; in addressing assumed population–environment problems (through their reproductive capacities); and in sustainable food production (as smallholders). Indeed, narratives that see women as ‘sustainability saviours’ are evident in many areas of debate, from those focused on green care economies or population–environment linkages, to those addressing conservation of climate, biodiversity, water and soils, to those building socially and environmentally sustainable services.

Yet such narratives carry dangers. They often assume, again, on women’s unpaid care and reproductive work – sustaining people and ecologies – without granting this due recognition, support and consideration of redistribution with men and others. They frequently treat ‘women’ as homogeneous, ignoring the vital intersections with class, ethnicity, age and identity that shape their interests, knowledge, values, opportunities, capabilities and rights. They ignore the gender relations – in rights, resource access and control, voice and power – that shape whether women’s action and work towards economic or environmental sustainability translates into benefits – in enhanced rights, capabilities, dignity, bodily integrity. Thus women’s involvement in pathways to sustainability does not necessarily mean greater gender equality; on the contrary, as the examples of population and agriculture show, ‘instrumentalizing’ women to save the planet can entrench and worsen gender inequalities.

This is why it is important, always, to attend to the politics of sustainability – asking ‘sustainability of what, for whom’, and to avoid trade-offs in which economic or environmental sustainability is secured at the expense of gender equality and women’s rights and capabilities. Sustainable development, as we define it, must include gender equality as integral; the challenge is to identify and support alternative sustainable development pathways that promote gender equality

and women's rights, voice and bodily integrity. This requires analysis and action based on a truly gendered pathways approach.

What areas of theory, policy and debate are most helpful in developing and enriching such an approach? The next section examines the intellectual underpinnings of a range of key concepts and policy debates around sustainability and sustainable development, considering how gender has been conceptualized within these.

## **Gender and sustainable development: Reviewing concepts and debates**

Although 'sustainability' has become a key concept guiding global, national and local institutional frameworks, policies and interventions, the concept is ever-changing, deeply debated and contested. Gender has been variously ignored by, or incorporated into, conceptualizations and policy debates in a diversity of ways. A brief review highlights the historical roots of some key concepts and approaches that continue to co-exist and compete today, albeit in contemporary forms. Specifically, we draw on a long and rich history of work on gender, environment and sustainable development over the past 30 years, with feminist theory co-evolving with feminist movements. We highlight the origins of both continuing problematic narratives about women, gender and sustainability; and also strands of feminist analysis that offer valuable insights to enrich a gendered pathways approach and inspire a transformative politics of sustainable development.

### ***Colonial and neocolonial economic and environmental policies***

The term 'sustainability' was first coined in an environmental context by a German forester (von Carlowitz, 1712) to prescribe how forests should be managed on a long-term basis. The emphasis on conserving economically valuable natural resources to sustain European powers was a key thread in imperial and colonial environmental policies, along with aesthetic and moral desires to preserve an imagined, remaining pristine nature and wilderness in the tropics. Colonial conservation policies and practices ranged from forest reserves and 'scientifically managed' plantations to protect supplies of commodities such as timber and rubber (Sivaramakrishnan, 1999) to watershed protection policies and the creation of wildlife reserves (Anderson and Grove, 1987). They were frequently justified by narratives that local populations were incapable stewards of natural resources, whose 'primitive' agricultural hunting, gathering and fire-setting practices caused environmental degradation. The practices of colonial science and administration often went hand-in-hand to label local people as environmental destroyers, justifying their removal, restriction or re-education (Fairhead and Leach, 1996; Leach and Mearns, 1996; Beinart and McGregor, 2003; Adams, 2004). They often had devastating social consequences, dispossessing local women and men of land and livelihoods, and supporting exploitative and degrading labour practices.

Ecofeminists have argued that the colonial period – building on Enlightenment ideas – led to the simultaneous domination of women and nature (Merchant, 1980; Mies, 1986; Mies et al, 1988; Shiva, 1988). Thus Shiva argues that colonial development in India led to the subjugation of a pre-colonial ‘feminine principle’ that had underpinned harmony with nature and equitable social and gender relations. Mies and Shiva (1993) characterize imperialism and colonialism as bearers of a particular western, mechanistic, ‘masculinist’ science and rationality, ‘doing violence’ to women and nature. Other anthropological and historical analyses, while critical of such generalizations about femininity and nature, nevertheless highlight diverse ways of living sustainably with dynamic local ecologies to which women were often central (e.g. Boserup, 1970; Appfell-Marglin and Simon, 1994). They have documented the complex and variegated gender relations in these systems, the gender-differentiated effects of colonial policies (e.g. Mackenzie, 1998) and women’s tactical negotiations in response (Allman et al, 2002).

Such analyses are deeply relevant today. Forms of economic development that dispossess people of rights and livelihoods still abound, such as large dams – now often justified as bringing environmentally ‘clean’ hydropower, yet with negative local ecological as well as social and gendered impacts (see Mehta, 2009a). Neocolonial ‘fortress’-like conservation policies and enclosures continue to be implemented in areas such as forest and wildlife conservation (West et al, 2006; Brockington et al, 2008), while the past decade has seen a new wave of large-scale foreign investments in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America in commercial crops and biofuels for export. Although the actors and dynamics are different, these global land, water and ‘green’ grabs – and the narratives of local resource mismanagement that underpin them – offer striking similarity (Fairhead et al, 2012; Mehta et al, 2012). Unpicking gendered effects of dispossession, and bringing to light alternative pathways, is more critical than ever.

### ***Social and environmental movements***

The colonial period also illustrates the start of emerging tensions, between short-term economic profit and long-term environmental implications, that have continued to the present. Social and environmental movements have been key in identifying and responding to such tensions.

In the global North, movements from the 1960s and 1970s focused on pollution, resource depletion and habitat loss. Together with cornerstone publications such as *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962) and *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al, 1972), they fuelled a growing public and political consciousness of the environmental downsides of economic growth. Social and environmental movements in Asian, Latin American and African settings, in contrast, focused mainly on the negative impacts of economic and environmental policies on local livelihoods, and the protection of local social and indigenous people’s rights and wellbeing. Examples from the 1970s include movements resisting large dams and displacement, mining and forest destruction (Doyle, 2005). The 1974 Chipko movement resisting industrial logging

in the Himalayas was primarily a livelihood-protection movement, but went on to become a celebrated exemplar and symbol for non-violent environmental protest and women's roles in it. Similar symbolism attached to Kenya's Green Belt Movement, founded by Professor Wangari Maathai in 1977, which encouraged rural women to work together to plant trees for livelihoods and conservation. Women's central involvement in many movements encouraged analysts later to make stereotyped linkages between women and 'nature'. Nevertheless, most shared a general and important narrative critiquing dominant economic development pathways and their social and gendered consequences, and forwarding alternatives. This set the stage for many further forms of feminist mobilization for sustainable development to the present.

### ***Sustainable development; women, environment and development; and ecofeminism***

Against this backdrop, in the 1980s the term 'sustainability' came into wider currency in efforts to show how environmental issues might be linked to mainstream questions of economic and social development. The landmark UN Commission report *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987) established what is still the most widely accepted concept of sustainable development (discussed above). This linked sustainability firmly to questions of human economic and social needs, 'in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given' (Brundtland, 1987, p43). Yet, in its static notion of 'needs', the concept stops short of concern with capabilities, rights and justice as goals of sustainable development. The Brundtland report also paid little attention to intra-generational equity, including gender equality.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, 1992 provided a landmark forum where diverse approaches to sustainable development were debated by governments, civil society and social movements. It launched high-level convention processes around global environmental issues – including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), setting in train intergovernmental negotiations and related national action plans that have continued to the present. Yet global negotiations have failed to meet targets, while many national sustainability plans became forms of managerialism that failed to challenge the political-economic processes supporting unsustainable pathways (Berkhout et al, 2003).

Agenda 21 at Rio envisaged sustainability being built from the bottom up through initiatives by local governments, community groups and citizens (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998; Selman, 1998). It stimulated a plethora of 'community-based' and joint state-local sustainable development projects and programmes across the world, around water, fisheries, forests, wildlife, urban environments and other issues. These initiatives embodied important recognition of local resource rights and collective action. Yet many suffered from an overly homogeneous and

romanticized view of ‘the community’ that failed to account for socially and gender-differentiated perspectives and priorities (Leach et al, 1999; Dressler et al, 2010), or involved women only tokenistically in project management committees. This tendency has continued in much community-based sustainable development to the present.

Around Rio 1992, a wide coalition of NGOs and social movements, including the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and others lobbied hard to integrate gender concerns into emerging sustainable development debates. Women’s Action Agenda 21 was produced and fed into the 1991 Miami World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet. This critiqued existing development pathways and free-market thinking, instead embracing the concept of ‘sustained livelihoods’ and flagging the need to link everyday practices of care, social reproduction and resource justice (see Wichterich, 2012). Yet many of the alternatives put forward by women’s groups and networks in the ‘Global Women’s Lobby’ in Rio were overshadowed by the optimism towards economic efficiency, technology and markets (Wichterich, 2012). DAWN and other groups called ‘sustainable development’ a huge contradiction, calling for transformation of growth-based development models towards gender-equitable development (Wiltshire, 1992).

Agenda 21 and post-Rio debates did recognize women as important actors in environmental protection and poverty alleviation, but treated gender in an instrumentalist rather than a transformative way – following dominant ‘women, environment and development’ (WED) approaches. In the 1980s, a plethora of publications by scholars, NGOs and donor agencies had forwarded a strong narrative that women were the primary users and managers of the environment at the local level (e.g. Dankelman and Davidson, 1988; Rodda, 1991). What came to be termed the WED approach translated ‘women in development’ (WID) perspectives into the environmental domain. WED discourse valuably highlighted the significance of local environments to women’s lives and livelihoods, and underlined the importance of alternative pathways in which women were central. However, like WID, WED gave a rather homogeneous, static view of women and their roles, ignoring their shaping by gender and social relations. Women–environment connections – especially in reproductive and subsistence-focused activities such as collecting fuelwood, hauling water and cultivating food – were often presented as if natural and universal.

In early WED debates, women often appeared as victims of environmental degradation – imagery revived in recent narratives about climate change impacts. Later, the positive image of women as agents – effective environmental managers and conservers of resources – gained ground. This underpinned narratives that women should be harnessed as ‘sustainability saviours’. Thus the World Bank developed a ‘synergistic’ or ‘win–win’ approach, arguing for a general identity of interest between women and environmental resources (see Jackson, 1998 for a fuller discussion). Women were also conceptualized as the central agents of

community-based conservation and ‘primary environmental care’. Yet the ensuing projects and policies often mobilized women’s labour, skills and knowledge, ‘instrumentalizing’ women and adding to their unpaid care roles without addressing whether they had the rights, voice and power to control project benefits. This tendency persists to the present in recent approaches to population and environment, and to green economies.

WED also had strong synergies with ecofeminism, which emerged as a powerful discourse in the late 1980s and early 1990s, based on the notion that women are especially ‘close to nature’ (e.g. Plumwood, 1986; Shiva, 1988; Mies and Shiva, 1993). Ecofeminism has many strands, some naturalizing and essentializing a femininity–nature connection, others seeing this as a social, cultural or ideological construct. Most assume that violence against nature goes hand-in-hand with violence against women; hope for sustainable and equitable development therefore lies in recovering people–nature interdependence grounded in a ‘feminine principle’.

Ecofeminist views of natural linkages between women and nature sometimes served to justify WED-type projects that instrumentalized women’s roles – yet these linkages rarely stand up to historical or anthropological scrutiny (Joeques et al, 1996). Equally problematic is the assumption that sacralized views of ‘nature’ go hand-in-hand with harmonious environmental practices and egalitarian gender relations (Croll and Parkin, 1992). Such critiques and debates around WED and ecofeminism circulated intensely in the 1990s, a vibrant period for feminist analysis of sustainable development (Braidotti et al, 1994; Harcourt, 1994a,b; Leach, 1994). Nevertheless ecofeminism inspired – and continues to inspire – valuable critiques of modern science, endorsement of local and indigenous knowledges, and social movements and political action, for instance around energy systems and peace (see also Wichterich, 2012), highlighting alternative narratives and pathways.

### ***Feminist political economies and ecologies***

From the early 1990s, feminist scholars advanced social relational perspectives on environment and sustainable development. Many of these drew their grounding from feminist political economy analyses, especially of households and agrarian change, and of states, markets, production and reproduction (e.g. Benería and Sen, 1981; Young et al, 1984; Folbre, 1994), as well as from gender and development (GAD) scholarship. Up to the present, feminist political economy offers invaluable critiques of dominant development pathways and the ways they produce social unsustainability and gender inequality, advocating transformational alternatives based on rights, capabilities, and social and gender justice (Rai and Waylen, 2013). Integrating ecological dimensions, several important approaches emerged including feminist environmentalism (Agarwal, 1992); gender, environment and development (Braidotti et al, 1994; Leach, 1994; Joeques et al, 1996); and feminist political ecology (Rocheleau et al, 1996).

Despite their differences, these perspectives share a number of core ideas. First, women’s (and men’s) relationships with the environment are seen to emerge from

the social context of dynamic gender relations – not an a priori special relationship with nature. Thus women's close involvement in gathering wild foods, for instance, might reflect labour and tenure relations, and lack of access to income from trees on private holdings (cf. Rocheleau, 1988; Agarwal, 1992). Second, different women – and men too – have very different interactions with land, trees, water and so on, associated with class, age, ethnicity and kinship positions. Third, unlike WED, which focused on roles, importance is given to relations of tenure and property, and control over labour, resources, products and decisions. Environmentally related rights and responsibilities are almost always contingent on class, kin, household and state arrangements and the negotiations these entail; arrangements that need to be understood and addressed if the aim is to enhance women's rights and agency. Finally, gender analyses of environmental relations point out the fallacy of assuming that women's participation in environmental projects is coterminous with benefit. Allocating women responsibility for 'saving the environment' could increase their workloads or reinforce regressive gender roles, rather than representing progressive change or enhanced gender equity (Leach, 1992; Jackson, 1998).

Feminist political ecology (FPE) fused feminist political economy and broader political ecology approaches to address the intersections between ecology and gendered power relations on scales from household up to global. Building on feminist critiques of science (e.g. Haraway, 1988), FPE emphasized the significance of alternative and gendered forms of knowledge, challenging epistemology, objectivity and rationality whilst embracing the gendering of knowledge, human embodiment, subjectivity and political agency (Wright, 2010, p819). And it drew attention to the power of emancipatory social movements, often grounded in alternative knowledges and collective action, in struggles for rights and environmental protection (Rocheleau et al, 1996; Nightingale, 2006, 2011). While most feminist political ecologists are critical of romanticized visions of 'community' that side-step questions of class, gender or other social divisions (e.g. Rocheleau et al, 1996; Agarwal, 2001; Asher, 2004; Resurreccion, 2006), at least in some conceptions of FPE there are dangers of romanticism (and sometimes essentialism) in ideas of 'the indigenous' and indigenous movements.

In recent years, new feminist political ecology (NFPE) has added to these debates, emphasizing how gender is 'performed' in different contexts, thereby encompassing multiple and complex subjectivities (Butler, 1994; Resurreccion and Elmhirst, 2008). It turns attention to 'the entangled processes of the production of nature and subjectification/subjectation as this relates to gendered roles, landscapes, bodies, livelihood strategies...' (Hawkins and Ojeda, 2011, p250). NFPE has also drawn on gender with a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) perspective, going beyond dualisms in discourses, bodies and subjectivities to highlight problems with the dominant heteronormative lens in environment and development debates. A performative approach to gender draws attention to the multiple processes by which the 'gendered subject' is continually constructed and reconstructed through social, political-economic and ecological engagements, extending from the most



intimate and emotional to the global (Elmhirst, 2011; Sultana, 2011, Truelove, 2011). It connects with feminist work on embodiment (e.g. Braidotti, 1994) and on the changing character of masculinities, femininities and ‘intersectional’ identities, including in the hyper-materialist contexts of late capitalism (e.g. Edström et al, 2014).

### ***Sustainability politics: Whose futures count?***

As the world approached the run-up to Rio+20, the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, narratives around the meanings of, and potential pathways to, sustainable development were even more divided and contested than 20 years earlier. The 1990s and 2000s had seen the consolidation of neoliberal policies and practices, the rise of corporate power, and growing political and economic strength amongst ‘rising powers’, creating an even more challenging landscape for international cooperation. At the same time, the real impacts of shocks and stresses in climate, food and finance were increasingly felt throughout the world. In this context, many policy and business actors, cynical about the prospects of sustainable development, instead embraced apparently positive alignments between economic growth and environment through notions such as the green economy. Yet, in parallel, social movements and activism around environment and development have flourished, contesting dominant perspectives on issues such as climate change, water privatization, genetically modified organisms, biodiversity and land grabbing, and advocating alternative pathways that link sustainable development firmly with questions of social justice.

Compared with 1992, feminist visions and contributions were notably less vocal in Rio 2012’s debates about *The Future we Want* (Wichterich, 2012). Indeed, many current mainstream sustainability literatures and policy debates are remarkably gender blind, or continue to mobilize problematic narratives that see women narrowly as environmental victims or sustainability saviours. This is the case for three key sets of contemporary discourse and practice – around climate change, planetary boundaries and the green economy. Yet in these, too, important feminist and gendered critiques and alternatives are emerging from the margins and from social movements.

Since the 2000s, climate change has been taken seriously as a major issue involving politics, economics and injustice. The relative successes and setbacks of global climate change frameworks and negotiations, difficulties in implementing principles of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ in mitigating far-reaching threats, and the plight and coping strategies of people already faced with the need to adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses have galvanized public reaction, and a renewed and globalized environmental politics involving movements and campaign groups stretching across local and global scales. Yet the 1992 UNFCCC was a remarkably gender-blind document, and subsequent efforts to mainstream gender issues into climate change debates have been very piecemeal (Denton, 2002; Skutsch, 2002). The focus on universal issues and consensus has compromised



a focus on gender, while even discussions of equity and climate change have downplayed its gender dimensions (Lambrou and Paina, 2006). Only in 2008 did the UNFCCC Secretariat call for gender-sensitive measures. 'No climate justice without gender justice' was a rallying cry for feminist lobbyists at the 2008 Bali conference, which launched groups such as the Women for Climate Justice Network and Global Gender and Climate Alliance (see Terry, 2009).

To the extent that they address gender, climate policy documents often repeat WED-type problematic narratives, either stereotyping women as victims, or assuming them saviours in keeping their communities resilient or adopting low-carbon technologies (for critiques see MacGregor, 2010; Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Yet feminist political economy/ecology analysis underscores how gender and class relations, rights and inequalities shape differences in women's and men's vulnerability to climate change, and opportunities to be agents in mitigation and adaptation (Agarwal, 2002). For instance, in contexts of entrenched discrimination, women's inclusion in technical committees for low-carbon technologies can increase women's workloads and reinforce gender stereotypes, as Wong (2009) shows for solar home systems in Bangladesh. Women can be key agents in low-carbon development, but only with attention and support to their specific knowledge and capacities (Otzelberger, 2011).

Much of the debate on gender and climate change has focused on adaptation and local-level vulnerabilities, with much more limited, and only recent, attention to gender in debates around large-scale technologies, market initiatives and climate finance (see World Bank, 2011; Schalatek, 2013). International agreements on gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), are insufficiently reflected in national adaptation or low-carbon development plans (Otzelberger, 2011). This poor integration is a reflection of, and in turn reinforces, the tendency for policy to focus on simplistic imagery and apparent quick wins, rather than the more structural political-economic changes needed to re-steer pathways of climate unsustainability and gender inequality.

A second contemporary debate centres on notions of planetary boundaries. Influential scientific analyses suggest that we have entered the anthropocene, a new epoch in which human activities have become the dominant driver of many Earth system processes, including climate, biogeochemical cycles, ecosystems and biodiversity. A series of nine planetary boundaries has been identified, referring to the biophysical processes in Earth's system on which human life depends (Rockström et al, 2009a), which together serve to keep the planet within Holocene-like conditions and thus define a so-called 'safe operating space' for humanity. Potentially catastrophic thresholds are in prospect, it is argued, providing a new urgency and authority to arguments that development pathways must reconnect with the biosphere's capacity to sustain them (Folke et al, 2011). A recent update (Steffen et al, 2015) identifies two core boundaries – climate change and biosphere integrity – each of which, it is claimed, could on its own

drive the Earth system into a new state, should they be substantially and persistently transgressed.

While the science is still developing, the concept of planetary boundaries has become influential within policy debates – but is also critiqued. Some actors, including some developing country governments, interpret it as anti-growth and development. Others suggest that planetary boundaries thinking privileges universal global environmental concerns over diverse local ones, justifying top-down interventions that protect the environment at the expense of people and their livelihoods. The renewed narratives of impending scarcity and catastrophe implied by some interpretations of planetary boundaries arguments risk a return to draconian policies and unjust responses that limit people's rights and freedoms, as Hartmann et al show in relation to population (see Chapter 3). That steering development within planetary boundaries should not compromise inclusive development that respects human rights has been proposed by Raworth (2012), whose 'doughnut' concept takes the circle of planetary boundaries and adds an inner 'social foundation'. In between these is a 'safe and just operating space' for humanity, within which sustainable development pathways should steer (Leach et al, 2013). Raworth (2012) notably introduces gender equality as one dimension of this social foundation, but otherwise discussion and advocacy arising from the planetary boundaries concept has been largely gender-blind.

Finally, a focus on green economies is now capturing the attention of governments, businesses and NGOs alike. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which launched its Green Economy Initiative in 2008, a green economy is one that results in improved human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities; it is low-carbon, resource-efficient and socially inclusive (UNEP, 2013a). This general definition integrates social, ecological and economic concerns in ways akin to sustainable development. Yet, in practice, there are many versions of green economy thinking. Dominant ones assume continued, even enhanced market-led economic growth, through green business investments and innovations that enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of ecosystem services. It has been argued that the emerging green technology economy will be worth US\$4.2 trillion annually by 2020 (Clancy, 2009). Other strands emphasize market-based approaches to environmental protection through financial valuation of 'natural capital' (e.g. Natural Capital Committee, 2013), payments for ecosystem services, and schemes for trading carbon and biodiversity credits and offsets.

However, others argue that environmental constraints require a rethink of growth and market strategies. UNEP's 'decoupling' (Fischer-Kowalski et al, 2011) suggests that economic growth should be de-linked from the increasing consumption of material resources such as construction minerals, fossil fuels and biomass. Jackson (2009) argues for a shift in focus towards prosperity and wellbeing with reduced or no growth, in which investments in services and care, as well as in 'green' action in the areas of sustainable food production and marketing and clean energy, are key.

Mainstream approaches to defining and developing green economies have paid little attention to their differentiated implications for women and men (see Naret Guerrero and Stock, 2012). Feminist analysis and activists are critical, arguing that Rio+20 missed a chance to break with the business-as-usual global economic model, which produces environmental destruction, social exploitation and inequality (Unmüßig et al, 2012; Wichterich, 2012; Schalatek, 2013). They see the green economy as a market-based approach that justifies the commodification and enclosure of resources and commons, undermining livelihoods, justifying land and green grabs (Borras et al, 2011; Fairhead et al, 2012; Mehta et al, 2012) and dispossessing local people – especially women food producers. Feminists variously call instead for ‘green development’ that respects commons and livelihoods (Agarwal, 2010); for recognition and value of care and social reproduction in green economy debates (e.g. Vaughan, 2007; Mellor, 2009); for replacing efficiency with sufficiency (Salleh, 2009; Mehta, 2010); and for a focus on commons and communing and ‘enough’ and more fundamental ‘green transformations’ that restructure production, consumption and political-economic relations along truly sustainable pathways (Wichterich, 2012, 2015). The Women’s Major Group at Rio argued for social equity, gender equality and environmental justice to be placed at the heart of a ‘sustainable and equitable’ (as opposed to green) economy, grounded in ethical values such as respect for nature, solidarity, caring and sharing (see also UNDP, 2013a). These arguments link with growing narratives and action around alternative economies and solidarity economies (Unmüßig et al, 2012), and powerful examples of feminist collective organizing and social movement activism around the world.

The contradictory processes after the 2008 global financial crash and the accompanying food, climate and resource crises highlight the need to interweave both feminist political economy critiques of macroeconomics, trade and labour relations, and feminist political ecology approaches that highlight gendered access to and control over resources and links with subjectivity, identities and the politics of knowledge. As Wichterich (2015) eloquently argues, both approaches deconstruct ‘othering’ (be it of women as carers of unpaid work, or of nature) and provide an intersectional and context-specific analysis of gender in global and local power structures. Both also understand gender as a key social category of inequality, and are concerned with processes of inclusion, exclusion and othering in this new landscape of neoliberalism and resource commodification (Wichterich, 2015). Using both approaches to revitalize debates concerning care, commons, commoning and cultures of sufficiency, solidarity or enough can thus provide powerful critiques of current growth-oriented paradigms and their destructive impacts on ecosystems and local people.

This account of the past few decades of thinking, policy and practice has also clearly highlighted that sustainability and sustainable development are political. An array of concepts, approaches and associated policies and actions have emerged, and continue to co-exist to the present, with much contestation. Feminist and gender-based analysis and action has been and remains key, although capacity to shape the mainstream has varied. Yet feminist thinking is also varied, producing a

variety of different narratives about women, gender and sustainability. Which concepts and approaches offer the most helpful insights and contributions to a fully gendered pathways approach?

## Elaborating a gendered pathways approach

Returning to our definition, the challenge is to identify and build pathways of sustainable development – that is, development that ensures human wellbeing, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice, now and in the future. Pathways, as defined and illustrated earlier, are alternative directions of intervention and change, underpinned by particular framings and narratives, which embody selective values, knowledge and power relations. As previous sections have shown, there are urgent needs to challenge current unsustainable pathways of production, consumption and distribution, and to recognize and support alternatives.

Insights from feminist scholarship offer valuable ways to enrich and elaborate a pathways approach, integrating a concern for gender equality into both the processes through which pathways develop and unfold, and their outcomes. Recent gender analyses underscore the importance of addressing not just women and men, but the ways that gender intersects with class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, place and other significant axes of difference. Feminist political economy and gender, environment and development (GED) approaches highlight the significance of gender relations and institutions – from households and kinship to states and markets – as part of pathways. Together with rights-based and capability approaches, they emphasize the importance and ingredients of substantive gender equality as key pathway goals or outcomes. These need to include equal access to decent work and secure livelihoods; the proper recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work; and equal access to key social and environmental services and benefits. Linking with ideas around green transformations, feminist political economy also underscores that sustainable development may not be possible without quite fundamental restructuring of political–economic–environmental relations.

Feminist and new feminist political ecology approaches highlight the importance of selective knowledge and power, underscoring the importance of challenging problematic narratives about gender and sustainability, and making space for alternative narratives and pathway processes built on alternative, gendered forms of knowing and being. They highlight the diversity and performative, embodied character of femininities, masculinities and related identities. This offers insights into the enhancement of recognition and dignity as key pathway goals. As we have seen, this requires challenging stereotypes around masculinity, femininity and their interconnections with ecology and economy, as well as assuring freedom from violence and violations of dignity and security, and assurance of bodily integrity, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Finally, feminist political ecology – along with feminist analyses of politics and governance – emphasizes the importance of equal participation in decision-making, and that this must happen at multiple, interconnected scales. They highlight the positive outcomes – in terms of alternative

narratives and visions of the future linked to pathways that generate sustainable and gender-equal outcomes – that come from support to women’s agency, power and voice, and assuring space for feminist collective action.

For gender equality to flourish, pathways therefore need to generate multiple capabilities and freedoms that go beyond basic material needs and rights. They also need to include opportunity and process freedoms that allow people to convert resources to multiple capabilities. The hope is that these then feed back to sustain ongoing processes of pathway generation and maintenance, that further reinforce sustainable development and gender justice. But this will often not be a linear process; there will be unexpected events, opportunities and setbacks, to which people, institutions and ecologies will need to adapt and respond.

Moreover, just as many pathways have converged in current, unsustainable directions, so too there are multiple possible sustainable development pathways. These may be associated with the values and goals of different groups or places, or across spatial and temporal scales; they may refer to particular dimensions of ecological integrity, or they may prioritize particular dimensions of gender equality. We need to respect diversity – to suit the hugely varying circumstances, lives, identities, perspectives and priorities of different women and men in different places across the world. We also need to recognize tensions and trade-offs between pathways; not all pathways that move towards ecological integrity or economic sustainability promote gender equality, and vice versa.

The interactions, feedbacks, non-linearities, trade-offs and tensions involved as pathways unfold are illustrated well by the examples of forest governance and sanitation (Boxes 1.1 and 1.2). They highlight that the process of adjudicating between pathways is a deeply political one, that needs to involve inclusive deliberation around choices and outcomes. Reflective learning processes – about what is working to sustain what for whom, with what implications for gender equality – should also be part of pathway creation processes, and these too need to be fully inclusive of women’s and men’s diverse forms, knowledges and perspectives.

### **BOX 1.1 FOREST PATHWAYS AND GENDER EQUALITY**

Forest landscapes illustrate well the interaction of ecological, social, technological and political-economic processes in shaping change. Whether in humid forests in Africa or the lowland and montane forests of South Asia, vegetation cover and quality reflect the dynamic interaction of ecology, soil and climate with people’s uses and practices, the latter shaped by livelihoods, social relations, knowledge and understanding, and forms of property and tenure. The same forests and trees may be variously valued by different people for their timber and gathered products, for their services in shade and ecosystem protection, or for their cultural values as places of ancestors, spirits, aesthetic meaning or social memory. Forest conditions have co-evolved, often over long periods, with gendered capabilities and relations in resource access,

use and control (Leach, 1994), resulting in a wide diversity of historically embedded forest pathways in different settings, associated with a variety of gendered values and outcomes.

Forests have been subject to many forms of policy and intervention, and as these have interacted with ongoing processes of change, so new pathways have emerged, with varying outcomes for gender equality. From colonial times onwards, successive state, donor-led and non-governmental programmes have focused on goals from sustaining supplies of timber and non-forest products to protecting watersheds and biodiversity, geared variously to local, national or global economic or environmental interests. The latest round of interventions focuses on carbon and climate change, gearing forest management to protecting and enhancing carbon stocks and sequestration to mitigate a perceived global climate crisis by offsetting emissions produced in industrialized settings. The many schemes that have emerged – associated variously with the UN-REDD (United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) process, Clean Development Mechanism, Voluntary Carbon Standard or unaccredited private deals – all revalue forests as a source of a carbon commodity to be exchanged in emerging markets. They involve knowledge, values, institutions and practices aligned with broader neoliberal environmentalism, geared to solving global sustainability challenges through financializing ecosystems and nature (Büscher et al, 2012). Projects are often justified through Malthusian narratives and associated methodologies that see forests as undergoing one-way degradation, with local users to blame (Leach and Scoones, 2013). As these forest carbon projects play out on the ground, they have often created pathways that aim to meet global sustainability needs but exclude local forest users and their livelihoods, contributing to dispossession (Corbera and Brown, 2008; Corbera and Schroeder, 2010) and becoming ‘green grabs’ (Fairhead et al, 2012). The result is often greater inequality and injustice for local users vis-à-vis external agencies and global actors, and sometimes along gendered lines as well. Fostering greater justice in forest carbon pathways requires shifts in the institutional, knowledge and power relations through which they are designed and conceived, and far greater inclusion of local women and men.

An alternative set of forest intervention pathways has focused on community-based and joint forest management. From the 1980s to the present, these generally conceive of sustainability in relation to local livelihood goals and cultural values, where necessary reconciling these with national and global priorities through collaborative institutions and decision-making. Such approaches thus have the potential to foster pathways that support local rights and capabilities. Yet the outcomes of community forest management for gender equality have varied considerably. In many cases, gendered interests and values in forest management have been subordinated to a generalized

notion of 'the community', through institutions dominated by men and community leaders. Gender relations and gendered forms of forest knowledge have not always been appreciated. However, Agarwal's (2010) work in Nepal and Gujarat, India provides evidence to show that gender equality in joint forest management processes is associated with positive outcomes for both forest ecology and gender equality. Gender-related inequality (unless mitigated by specific measures) is often associated with low or failed cooperation within forest management committees. Yet where women are full participants with voice and power in more gender-democratic committee structures (women's attendance rates and effective presence in the executive committees of community forestry institutions is found to improve significantly once more than a quarter of the committee consists of women), and gendered resource access is enabled with less strict forest closure regimes, voluntary cooperation by women and greater gender equity in benefit-sharing can be promoted along with better forest quality. This supports pathways that simultaneously promote sustainability according to local values, and gender equality.

### **BOX 1.2 DIFFERENT PATHWAYS IN SANITATION**

Access to improved sanitation has multiple benefits for women and girls. The privacy and dignity afforded through proper, separate sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities can improve girls' school attendance. Access to sanitation also prevents both men and women from losing critical days from work and livelihood activities due to ill health. Sanitation processes and outcomes are determined by a range of social, technological and ecological dynamics. Cultural practices and perceptions of digestion, purity and pollution differ tremendously around the world and profoundly influence whether externally driven sanitation initiatives get local uptake or not. Technological aspects (space, materials, design) often interact profoundly with ecological considerations (e.g. proximity to groundwater sources, presence of pathogens, contamination possibilities) to shape sanitation outcomes (see Movik, 2011).

Until recently, dominant pathways around sanitation have tended to neglect these multi-dimensional and gendered aspects. Dominant pathways have also tended to be top-down and prescriptive, focused on providing people with ready sanitary technology/infrastructure involving subsidies for hardware, usually accompanied by public health behaviour-change campaigns to encourage women and men to use the toilets. However, many top-down initiatives have failed miserably, especially in countries such as India, with local people preferring open defecation and using toilets for purposes such as storage.

Community-led total sanitation (CLTS), initiated by Dr Kamal Kar in 2000 in Bangladesh, has offered some powerful alternatives to mainstream sanitation pathways (see Kar and Pasteur, 2005; Mehta and Movik, 2011). CLTS aims at encouraging local people to build their own toilets according to the resources available, and to stop open defecation. This takes place through processes of self-analysis concerning the harmful impacts of open defecation, and changes initiated and sustained through local knowledge and people's collective action. The processes of change in CLTS aim to encourage ownership, leadership, and capacity among community members to bring about their own development. Gains made are both individual – in terms of improved health, more income arising from better productivity and reduced medical expenses, privacy and security for women; and collective – in terms of clean environments requiring the cooperation of every woman, man and child – leading to solidarity and social inclusion. When facilitated well, CLTS processes have the potential to trigger emotions within people that can bring about immediate and sustained change for people and communities (Kar and Pasteur, 2005; Mehta and Movik, 2011).

Gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainability in CLTS. For example, expecting women to shoulder responsibilities for fetching water and cleaning toilets can have an impact on sustainability. Women who are already burdened with work and have less time on their hands might not want to take on extra responsibilities which affect the continued behaviour change of using toilets and handwashing. In terms of gendered outcomes, CLTS can be empowering in terms of improved reproductive and sexual health, work productivity, more income and bargaining power. Women have also been encouraged to play an important leadership role in many communities, and emerge as 'natural leaders' with the potential to develop into women's collectives, district-wide sanitation and school hygiene leaders. Once CLTS has been introduced in an area, there have been many cases where it can increase women's negotiating power in marriage, as many women refuse to marry into a household that defecates in the open. This is important for the sustainability, spread and scaling-up of CLTS.

However, there is a risk that certain groups could be excluded on the basis of the generation of powerful emotions, such as shaming when non-compliance takes place. Gender inequality could also increase, or not be addressed at all, because most often CLTS is implemented within pre-existing relations in a society. CLTS has the potential as an outcome to achieve solidarity and collective action, but it is not deliberately designed to address social inequalities. Furthermore, while CLTS has mobilized women en masse as so-called 'natural leaders' and enabled women in deeply hierarchical societies such as Haryana in India to assume leadership roles, it also builds on traditional notions of women as the keepers of cleanliness and order in the family. Maintaining toilets can also add to women's existing labour. Finally, CLTS contains some unknown risks around groundwater and soil contamination, issues that were not considered when the approach was conceived.



### ***Towards gender-equal sustainable development: Policy frameworks and political strategies***

To challenge unsustainable pathways and move towards sustainable development and gender equality will require action at many levels, by a diversity of actors. As the discussions of work, population, food, land, water and energy illustrate, states and intergovernmental processes must be central. However, key opportunities for transformation also lie in the ideas and actions of civil society and social movements, businesses and the private sector, communities and individuals – and in building gender-progressive sustainable development alliances between them.

States are the key arbiters and upholders of rights and freedoms for their citizens. Rather than leave everything to the market, states need strengthened capacity and ability to deliver on these in ways that respect sustainability and gender equality. This requires accountable frameworks that secure human rights, including gender-based rights in areas such as work and employment, reproduction and health, food and land, natural resource tenure, and rights to uphold and practise particular identities and sexualities. Governments also have central roles to play in providing public services, supporting the health, education and care for children, the elderly and the sick so essential to people's capabilities, and for assuring social dimensions of sustainability and continued social reproduction. As Ray shows in Chapter 6, public investment is also key in nurturing and scaling-out key innovations that offer vital prospects for improving sustainable development and gender equality, in areas such as the provision of modern energy services, water supplies and appropriate sanitation facilities.

There are, to be sure, growing opportunities for businesses and the private sector to contribute to sustainable development solutions – as emerging 'green economy' discourses emphasize. Nevertheless these often require state support to be viable, at least in the early stages. Meanwhile, growing evidence shows that partnership and 'co-production' arrangements – in which private, public and civil society actors work jointly to deliver health, housing or energy services, or manage forests, biodiversity or water – are often most effective. For such state or co-produced arrangements to work effectively for gender equality and sustainability, it is vital that women are involved centrally in planning and implementation – as Box 1.1, highlighting the advantages of women's involvement in forest management committees, exemplifies. Adequate financial resources are also required to achieve the goals of sustainable development (Schalatek, 2013).

National policies are increasingly shaped by international regimes and frameworks, globalization processes, and transnational policy transfer and learning. International human rights frameworks, those dealing with particular sectors (e.g. the right to water and sanitation, the right to food), and the CEDAW offer important frameworks within which states should be held to account. However, to achieve sustainable development, gender equality and human rights need to be brought far more fully into policy frameworks dealing with environment, development and sustainability questions. As we have shown, global efforts to integrate gender and sustainable development thus far have been mixed, ranging

from ‘total exclusion to minimal inclusion’ (UNDP, 2012, p30). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) made strong commitments to both environmental sustainability (MDG 7) and gender equality (MDG 3), but goals, targets and implementation remained separate. Joined-up, integrated thinking and action is a key challenge and opportunity for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals framework. Meanwhile, there needs to be far more inclusion of gender equality concerns and women’s participation in ongoing international policy processes around climate change, biodiversity, land, energy and green economies, whether in Conferences of Parties and other intergovernmental processes, or policy-influencing global fora and assessments. Ongoing efforts to mainstream gender, for instance by UNEP, UNDP (2013b) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 2013), need to be strengthened and intensified, and connected more strongly with an equality and rights-based approach.

Growing evidence and analysis shows that sustainable development requires governance and action that extends from global across national to local scales. If well co-ordinated, such ‘nested’ or ‘polycentric’ approaches are best placed to address environmental and economic challenges (Agarwal, 2010; Ostrom, 2010). This suggests a need for questions of gender equality and for representation of women’s interests to be included, from local to global institutions.

Formal policies and rights frameworks are clearly insufficient unless policies are implemented and rights are made real, however. Equally, women’s participation has too often translated into tokenism or co-optation. Feminist analysis and experience therefore points to the importance of informal political strategies and tactics in engaging with policy processes: resisting, reshaping, subverting, reclaiming (Calas and Smircich, 1999; True, 2003). Feminist action is also central in challenging and reworking the discourses, cultures, practices, biases and stereotypes that beset policy institutions and organizations, as Razavi and Qayum emphasize in Chapter 7. This can happen through feminist action within bureaucracies (Goetz, 1997; Rao, 2006; Sandler and Rao, 2012; Smyth and Turquet, 2012), where ‘insider-outsider’ strategies, informal alliances and relationship networks prove key in the complex process of translating policy into practice for desired outcomes. It can also be assisted by ‘external’ pressure from social movements and activism.

Indeed, the growth of movements around gender equality and ‘green’ issues – and their coming together in forms of collective organizing around sustainable development and social justice – is one of the most exciting developments of recent years. Building on long histories of movement activism, in many countries and regions citizens, informal economy workers, producers and consumers are organizing collectively, both to contest dominant pathways and to advocate for – and demonstrate – alternative pathways. Examples are multiplying rapidly. They include, for instance, La Via Campesina, which from the 1990s has built into a globally networked movement to defend the rights of small farmers in the face of pressures from large-scale corporate agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Promoting a vision of small-scale peasant farming rooted in agro-ecological techniques, local markets and ‘food sovereignty’ (Borras, 2004; McMichael, 2009), some, though by no means all,

strands emphasize central recognition of, and support to, the rights of women as small-scale food producers. They include movements initiated by groups of poor urban dwellers in many cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America, linking wellbeing and rights to homes and livelihoods with the design of decent, sustainable urban spaces (Satterthwaite et al, 2011). In the case of Slum and Shack Dwellers' International,<sup>2</sup> groups initiated around women's savings, credit associations and waste-pickers' cooperatives have networked into a federated global structure that now covers 30 countries, linking local action with campaigning around global agendas. Many other examples are emerging around alternative and 'solidarity' economies, food and land, water and energy.

In such examples, collective action, organization and cooperation provide the basis for alternative pathways that provide routes to social, economic and political empowerment, and environmental sustainability. Networking and alliance-building provide routes through which the everyday actions and knowledge of women and men around work, industry, land, food, water, energy and climate, in diverse places around the world, can begin to add up and scale-out into broader pathways. With appropriate state support, they offer powerful complements or correctives to current mainstream approaches that rely just on individuals and businesses linked through markets as the focus of sustainability and green economies, and offer powerful hopes for transformed, more sustainable and gender-equitable futures.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that gender equality must be integral to sustainable development. We have demonstrated many reasons why: apart from the moral and ethical imperatives involved, attention to gender differences and relations is vital to avoid the costs of economic and environmental change undermining gendered rights and capabilities, undermining further the sustainability of households, communities and societies. And it is crucial in order to recognize and build on the agency and knowledge of diverse women and men towards sustainable pathways.

Around many issues – whether work and industrial production, population and reproduction, food and agriculture, or water, sanitation and energy, dominant development pathways have proved both unsustainable and gender unequal. Economic, social and environmental unsustainability, and gender inequality, are both produced by, and yet threaten to undermine, market-focused, neoliberal patterns of growth. As troubling intersections of unsustainability and gender inequality threaten or exceed planetary boundaries around climate change, biodiversity and pollution, so shocks, stresses and feedbacks may undermine gendered rights and capabilities even further. Yet, as we have shown, the reverse is possible – gender equality and sustainability can powerfully reinforce each other in alternative pathways.

Integrating gender equality with sustainable development requires sharp conceptual understanding of both concepts and their interlinkages. This chapter has developed a 'gendered pathways approach', offering this as a conceptual

framework for addressing the interactions, tensions and trade-offs between different dimensions of gender equality and sustainability. Enriched through insights from several decades of feminist thinking and practice, especially in feminist political economy and political ecology, the gendered pathways approach offers guidelines to analysing current pathways of change, and imagining and appraising alternatives. Applying elements of the pathways approach to issues of work, population, food, land, water and energy, subsequent chapters in this book demonstrate that there are multiple ways to challenge current unsustainable pathways, and multiple alternative pathways to sustainability that embrace gender equality. They also reveal that powerful narratives have sometimes worked to hide or misrepresent gender–sustainability linkages, justifying dispossession and essentializing women as ‘sustainability saviours’.

As we have demonstrated, and as the chapters illustrate, there will always be tensions. Some pathways will promote sustainability at the cost of gender equality; some may promote gender equality and neglect key dimensions of sustainability. Since pathways are dynamic, they can also have unintended social, technological and environmental consequences, which also affect outcomes in terms of gender (in)equality. Negotiating such dynamics requires inclusive learning and deliberation processes, and ways to monitor exclusions, trade-offs and emerging opportunities, as well as ongoing awareness of the complex politics of both gender and sustainability.

We want to end with hope, however. There are many alternative pathways to sustainability and gender equality, albeit currently under-appreciated. They exist in urban and rural spaces where women and men make and sustain their livelihoods, in women’s cooperatives and movements, in the writings of feminist scholars, and in the margins of bureaucracies and global institutions. We need to seek out these champions and create conceptual and policy space for their ideas and practices. These offer powerful challenges to the logic of ‘homo economicus’ and to dominant patterns of consumption and production that are promoting structural inequalities and unsustainability. They offer alternatives with the potential to create green transformations that are gender and socially equitable. And an emerging politics of alliance-building for gender equality and sustainable development, combining movements, states and enlightened businesses, and formal and informal practices, offers the potential to make them real. Feminists have often been the ones to provide the most trenchant critiques of dominant thinking and ways of life, usually from the margins. It is now time to reclaim those margins and promote new ways of being.

## Notes

- 1 <http://viacampesina.org/en/>
- 2 [www.sdinet.org/about-what-we-do/](http://www.sdinet.org/about-what-we-do/)

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