



Original Article

Maintaining Sustainable Development through Gender Equality in Village Savings and Loans Associations Partners of FVS-Amie des Enfants in Makamba, Burundi

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Abstract: Today, gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress. Women and girls represent half of the world's population and half its potential. Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to a higher mortality rate. Thus, this study was about maintaining sustainable development through gender equality in village savings and loan associations' partners of FVS-Amie des enfants in Makamba. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of gender equality on sustainable development to promote poverty reduction, family welfare, education of children, and access to health services. The study employed a correlational research design and opted for the quantitative methods. The study used a sample size of 130 subjects and used survey techniques to gather primary data. The results indicate a strong positive and significant relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. The study concludes that implementing gender equality contributes to effective, sustainable development. Therefore, gender equality should be emphasized to improve sustainable development.

Keywords: Gender equality; Sustainable development; Village savings; Loans associations partners.



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1. Introduction

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and half its potential. But today gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress. As of 2014, 143 countries have guaranteed equality between men and women in their Constitutions but 52 have yet to take this step. Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to a higher mortality rate. As girls move into adolescence, gender disparities widen. Child marriage affects girls far more than boys. Globally, nearly 15 million girls under age 18 are married every year, or 37,000 each day. Marrying young also affects girls' education. About one-third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school ([Women, 2022](#)). The concept is that women and men, girls and boys, have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from)

economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and differences between men and women and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community and society.

Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men and girls and boys are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all human beings are free to develop their abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles. Gender equality is a matter of human rights and is considered a precondition for, and an indicator of, sustainable people-centred development (Unicef, 2017). In Burundi, as in other parts of the world, women make significant daily contributions, from bringing an income to their household as an employed wage earner to creating jobs as entrepreneurs to caring for their family and elders (Maleku et al., 2023). In Makamba, women are excluded from the leadership of the village savings and loans association, which negatively affects sustainable development. Initially, women were 75% and men were 25% in 2014. There are 489 VSLAs with 17,059 members, including 10,223 women and 6,836 men. It means that women are 60% and men are 40%. Each VSLA is managed by an Executive committee of 5 members elected by others.

Even though men are a minority among VSLA members, they become the majority at the level of the executive committees. Among those 489 VSLA of Makamba provinces, only 186 are women-led. It means that only 38% of the VSLAs are led by women, even if they represent 60% of the members. This situation proves that even if women are majority among the members of the VSLA; they lose control of them because they are not in the decision-making position (Nihangaza & Kwizera, 2023b, 2023a). Therefore, this study intended to investigate the influence of gender equality in leadership on sustainable development in Makamba Province. The concept of sustainable development is based on the concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), the concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all), and the concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations).

The essence of sustainable development derives from the Triple bottom line concept, which implies the balance between the three pillars of sustainability. Environmental sustainability focuses on maintaining the quality of the environment, which is necessary for conducting economic activities and maintaining people's quality of life. Social sustainability strives to ensure human rights and equality, preservation of cultural identity, respect for cultural diversity, race and religion, and economic sustainability to maintain the natural, social and human capital required for income and living standards. Complete sustainable development is achieved through a balance between all these pillars. However, the required condition is not easy to achieve because in achieving its goals, each pillar of sustainability must respect the interests of other pillars so as not to bring them into imbalance. So, while a certain pillar of sustainable development becomes sustainable, others can become unsustainable, especially regarding ecological sustainability, on which the overall development capacity depends (Klarin, 2018). According to Sharpley (2000), development and sustainability could be in juxtaposition, where both could have possible counterproductive effects, while neoclassical economists emphasize that there is no contradiction between sustainability and development (Lélé, 2005). Sachs (2015) also suggests that there is no development without sustainability or sustainability without development. Certain authors link the meaning of development to economic development and the term "underdeveloped areas" (later called "Third World Countries"), which US President Harry Truman introduced in the mid-20th century, signifying areas with a significantly lower standard of living than developed areas (Klarin, 2018).

Sustainable development should provide a solution for meeting basic human needs, integrating environmental development and protection, achieving equality, ensuring social self-determination and cultural diversity, and maintaining ecological integrity (Klarin, 2018). Achieving sustainable development means reconciling economic and environmental sustainability and prioritizing social sustainability. The realization of women's human rights, capabilities and well-being now and in the future requires paying specific attention to the care economy, that is, the provision of care through the family and/or household, markets, the non-profit sector and the public sector and/ or state, especially the "private" domain of non-market or unpaid care work (Women, 2021). Ultimately, income inequalities could hamper economic growth recorded over the past decade because they turn into inequalities in health, education, participation in the labor market and social exclusion as well as adversely impact the capacities of next generations. In unequal societies, individuals fall into a vicious circle of economic insecurity which affects their own choices and the ones of future generations, constituting an obstacle to inclusive development and sustainable growth. This is true for both men and women, but women are also more disadvantaged than men in most socio-economic areas. Based on the World Bank (2016), women earn three-quarters of what men earn at equal levels of qualification and education. In managerial positions, they are underrepresented. In contrast, they are overrepresented in the informal sector and in vulnerable employment. They spend twice as much time as men to process domestic chores and four times more to care for children. They represent 70% of the billion people who live on less than \$ 1 a day, being the first victims of poverty and inequality. They are often underpaid and underestimated (Razavi, 2012).

All gender inequalities do not go away with economic growth. For instance, gender gaps in legal rights do not necessarily close with income and should be reduced by national authorities' intervention (Razavi, 2012). Bérenger & Verdier-Chouchane (2011) highlight the need to provide gender-disaggregated statistics and to promote gender equality in national development programs. Education cannot be overemphasized, but given that important progress has been made, it is time to cover additional areas at the national level. Policymakers can follow a sequential approach by first targeting the issue of economic opportunities where gender inequality is the highest and then, focusing on gaps that do not disappear with economic growth. For sustainability in the longer term, this should be completed by shrinking the gender gaps in voice and agency. The effects of unsustainable patterns of development intensify gender inequality because women and girls are often disproportionately affected by economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007). The centrality of gender equality, women's empowerment and the realization of women's rights in achieving sustainable development has been increasingly recognized in recent decades. Linking gender equality and sustainable development is important for several reasons.

First, it is a moral and ethical imperative: achieving gender equality and realizing the human rights, dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women is a central requirement of a just and sustainable world. Second, it is critical to redressing the disproportionate impact of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses on women and girls, which undermine the enjoyment of their human rights and their vital roles in sustaining their families and communities. Third, and most significantly, it is important to build up women's agency and capabilities to create better synergies between gender equality and sustainable development outcomes. Women (2014) argues there is growing evidence of the synergies between gender equality, on the one hand, and economic, social and environmental sustainability, on the other. For example, when women have greater voice and participation in public administration, public resources are more likely to be allocated towards investments in human development priorities, including child health, nutrition and access to employment (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

Ensuring women's access to and control over agricultural assets and productive resources is important for achieving food security and sustainable livelihoods (Food and Agriculture Organization of the (Joint, 2011). Women's knowledge, agency and collective action are central to finding, demonstrating and building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage local landscapes; adapt to climate change; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation and energy services (Kabeer & Natali, 2013). In addition, while a trend in the reviewed studies shows gender equality influencing sustainable development, methodological gaps exist as some reviewed studies did not provide deeper insights into the relationships as they were particularly quantitative. Of all the gaps, contextual gaps majorly existed as none of the reviewed studies were particular to the Village Saving Loans Associations to the researcher's knowledge.

2. Materials and Methods

The study applied a correlational design and opted for a quantitative research approach to gather data from the study samples. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data in the sample size of 130 from the accessible population of 192 subjects determined using Slovin's formula. In this study, both primary and secondary sources were used. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0 was used to process and summarize information obtained from the questionnaires. Using the Pearson correlation coefficient of determination, inferential statistics like correlations were used to illustrate the relationship between variables (if any). In contrast, a scatter plot explained how the independent variable affected the dependent variable.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the respondents' views on whether Gender equality influences Sustainable development in Village Savings and Loans Associations partners of FVS-Amie des Enfants in Makamba, Burundi. The results are presented in the table below;

Table 1. Result of Correlation between Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

		Sustainable Development
Gender Equality	Pearson Correlation	0.885**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	130

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 indicates a strong positive and significant relationship between gender equality and sustainable development ($r=0.885$, $p\text{-value}<.01$). This implied that the improvement in gender equality was associated with sustainable development. This empirically meant that effective implementation of gender equality in VSLAs can actively affect the level of sustainable development.

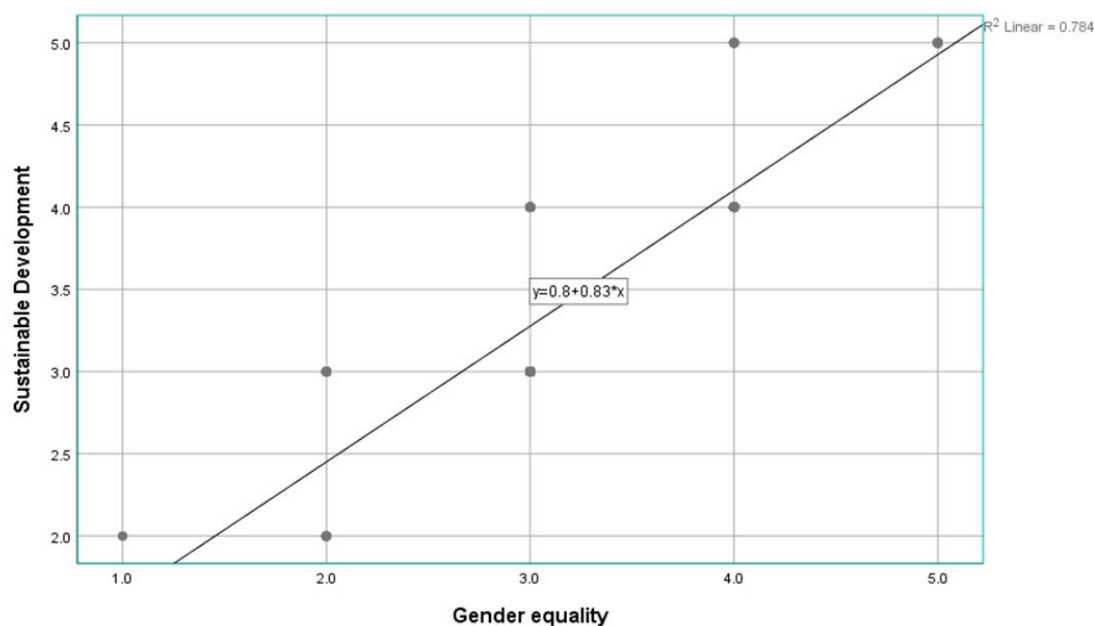


Figure 1. Scatter Plot with Regression Line a positive slope

Figure 1 displays the coefficient of determination (R Square = 0.784). It indicates that the independent variable explains 78.4% of the variability of sustainable development. From the findings, 21.6% is explained by other factors not considered in this study. The scatter plot of the data shown above clearly depicted the regression line showing a positive slope, indicating a direct positive relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. For this study, the general model equation to predict sustainable development in Burundi is given: $Y=0.8+0.83X$. The regression model for this study shows that sustainable development becomes 0.800 units ($\beta_0=0.800$) as gender equality is null. Therefore, one gender equality unit increases sustainable development by 0.83 units ($\beta_1=0.83$). This implied that whenever there is good gender equality, it influences sustainable development. This is supported by Neumayer & Plümper (2007) that the effects of unsustainable patterns of development intensify gender inequality because women and girls are often disproportionately affected by economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses. According to Women (2014), building up women's agency and capabilities is important to create better synergies between gender equality and sustainable development outcomes.

4. Conclusion

The study's findings revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. These findings conclude that gender equality contributes to effective, sustainable development. Therefore, gender equality should be emphasized to improve sustainable development. In line with the findings and conclusions of the study, the following were recommended: Women should have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and contributing to development. There is a need for society to value the similarities and differences between men and women and the roles they play. There is a need to consider the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men. Women should gain more power and control over their lives within and outside the home. There should be opportunities for women to access education and health services and earn an independent income;

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