

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

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Sustainable development is an approach that has become an organising principle or core assumption in discoursing, planning and managing human and environmental development since almost half a century ago. The most widely referred to definition of sustainable development is one that is offered in the report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development entitled *Our Common Future*, also more commonly known as the Brundtland Report. In the report (Brundtland 1987, 41), sustainable development is explained as:

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: (1) The concept of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and (2) The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.

Even when the Brundtland Report presented a defining and holistic shift in the way that development had been approached – by centralising human conduct and ethics and framing inclusiveness in development processes, the deeper connection between development and different forms of social inequalities, particularly gender inequality, were not adequately addressed in the document. However, the report was instrumental in becoming the foundation for many key efforts towards relooking at development and operationalising sustainable development, globally. The Brundtland Report’s emphasis on focusing on the “essential needs of the world’s poor” is an important foresight to addressing gender inequality. However, no specific reference to the gender context is made in discoursing poverty alleviation or economic development in the formulation of the sustainable development concept and framework.

Almost at the same time, or even preceding the emergence of the concept of sustainable development, feminist scholars were critiquing what was up to that point, a “welfarist” approach to include women in development, where women were passive recipients of benefits of development. Although concerns for positions and status of women in economic development had been highlighted in international discourses since the 1950s (Moser 1993, 3), women were not integrated as active agents into the development processes. Women still had limited access to and control over resources. In 1970, Ester Boserup (1970) argue that development affects women and men in different ways and thus the assumption of gender neutrality in approaching development discourses and planning must be reexamined. Boserup’s seminal work and the work of other feminist economists and scholars at the time became the bases for developing alternative approaches to development that primarily considers the effects of development on women. The Women in Development (WID) approach was developed in the early 1970s to focus on women’s integration into the economy in order to improve their status (Razavi and Miller 2000, 3). WID highlighted women’s valuable contributions to the productive economy but which were not recognised for providing access and benefits of development. WID’s focus on women’s productive role led to the rethinking about the definition of work, which often neglected to recognise “family labour”: housework and work related to women’s prescribed reproductive role are often not given economic value. This rethinking sets in motion the introduction of different ways and approaches to integrating women in the development process. Scholars and advocates discoursed on the interconnectedness of women’s productive and reproductive roles. This involved discussions of how the patriarchal context of the family and society influence women’s ability to gain access and opportunity to the benefits of productive work. The relevance of examining pervasive unequal gender relations in society in developing policy and planning development programmes were highlighted (Razavi and Miller 2000, 12). In brief, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach came about from this discourse. GAD uses the analyses of gender roles and social relations to understand how development has discriminatorily impacted women and to propose appropriate measures to achieve more equal outcomes.

Approaches to dealing with gender inequality in the context of development have evolved in different fields, forms, angles and emphases through the years since WID and GAD. In sustainable development discourses, the importance of gender analysis has been highlighted only in recent years. The United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 that preceded the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), includes the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as its Goal 3, by targeting the elimination of gender disparity in all levels of education. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) made a case for the inclusion of gender perspectives in addressing sustainable development. It argued that:

As a group, women – and their potential contributions to economic advances, social progress and environmental protection – have been marginalised. Better use of the world's female population could increase economic growth, reduce poverty, enhance societal well-being, and help ensure sustainable development in all countries.

In 2014, the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly published the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development,<sup>1</sup> with a specific theme of Gender and Sustainable Development. The World Survey 2014 argues for the “centrality of gender inequalities and gender power relations, as well as women's contributions, to sustainable development” (UN Women 2014, 1). According to the World Survey 2014:

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 redress 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.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the SDGs, as part of its action plan of “Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development” (UN Women n.d.). The SDGs consist of 17 goals that the global community pledges to achieve by 2030 in an effort to attain more sustainable future for all. Each of the goals includes targets to be achieved by member countries (UN Women n.d.).

The SDGs have identified women's empowerment and gender equality as central mandates of the instruments, requiring states' commitments and actions. SDG 5 specifically addresses these issues by providing these targets:

1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

3. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation.
4. Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
7. Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
8. Enhance the use of enabling technology, information and communications technology to promote the empowerment of women.
9. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

There is certainly more profound attention given by the SDGs, to include gender perspective and analysis, compared to the MDGs. In addition to provide a specific goal for gender equality and women's empowerment, the SDGs also require elements of gender inquiries in addressing the targets in a few other goals, which is an indication that gender has cross-cutting relevance and significance to sustainable development. In Goal 1 (no poverty), for example, in addressing poverty, countries are required to create robust national, regional and international policy frameworks that are based on "pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies". Target 2.2 of Goal 2 (zero hunger) aims to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030 by addressing the nutritional needs of "adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons". Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) promotes full and productive employment for all women and men and safe and secure working environment for all workers and for women migrant workers.

Malaysia joined other United Nations member countries in endorsing the adoption of the SDGs. The discourse and approach of sustainable development is not new to Malaysia. Even though the language of sustainable development

did not clearly feature in policy documents, elements of sustainable development, particularly of eradication of poverty and restructuring of societal imbalance, were introduced into Malaysia's economic policy in 1970 through the New Economic Policy (NEP). In 2009, Malaysia formulated the New Economic Model (NEM) which further cemented Malaysia's commitment to pursue sustainable development based on three pillars, namely high income, inclusivity and sustainability, which mirrors the three elements of the SDG, namely the economy, society and environment. The current five-year Malaysia Plan, which is the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016–2020) is premised on the three pillars of NEM. The theme of the 11th Malaysia Plan is "Anchoring Growth on People" where people will be the centrepiece of all development efforts and to ensure that no section of society is left behind in participating and benefiting from the nation's development. As far as the SDGs are concerned, Malaysia has started to take steps to localise and implement the listed goals. Malaysia has established a governance structure to monitor and report on the achievement of the goals. Malaysia ranks 55 out of 156 countries in the SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2018. It has an index score of 70.0 out of 100.0 (regional average score is 64.1). However, for Goal 5, Malaysia scores an index of 58.3, with the lowest score on the indicator on percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments (score of 10.4; notation of "major challenges remain"). On the other three indicators (unmet demand for contraception, female to male mean years of schooling and female to male labour force participation rate), a "significant challenges remain" notation is made for Malaysia.

SDG 5 on "achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls" cannot be treated as stand-alone goal as gender issues permeate in all SDGs. Although both MDGs and SDGs (specifically MDG 3 and SDG 5) promote gender equality, how far has Malaysia come into realising this vision and in improving the status of women around Malaysia? To assess progress made in improving the lives of women and men, the production and use of relevant, accurate and timely gender-related knowledge is critical. It is through the collection, production, analysis and use of gender-related data, both in the form of sex-disaggregated data and qualitative data, that policy makers and development practitioners can begin to properly address the specific issues of women and men.

While the concepts of women's empowerment and gender equality are widely adopted in a lot of advocacy and scholarly work, their conceptual domains may need to be further and continuously engaged with and contested in this current era of disruptive technology and fast-changing world. Definitions and scope of power and inequalities may need to be more deeply dived into in the environment of robotic displacement of human beings and instant, often unretractable communication. At the same time, we need to explore how elements in the new era can be reconstructed or redesigned to achieve real progress for women. Can they catalyse creative and collective powers to challenge injustices

and build sustained gender equality? This is where it is hoped that this special issue of “P.S the Women: Discoursing Gender in Sustainable Development” can be a contributor towards revisiting and co-creating new knowledge on sustainable development locally, in the region and internationally.

This special issue of *Kajian Malaysia* provides the opportunity for researchers from many different areas and aspects to uncover the issues pertaining to sustainable development and gender. One of the key challenges that hampers the implementation and monitoring of gender equality of all women and girls at the national level is the lack of adequate gender-sensitive data, including data disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant characteristics in national contexts. Of the 230 unique global SDG indicators, currently 53 (23%) make explicit reference to women, girls, gender or sex, including the 14 indicators under SDG 5. In addition, many gender-related indicators in other SDGs currently lack methodologies for data collection to support comprehensive and periodic monitoring. Such lack of data on key areas of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls weakens the ability of member states and other stakeholders to develop evidence-based policies. The absence of statistics in these areas may be attributed to a lack of prioritising gender equality in data collection and from a lack of resources. Thus, this special issue seeks to remedy this important gap by bringing together the writings of well-established researchers who are doing some of the most exciting work in sustainable development and gender equality of women and girls.

The Malaysian government has provided various platforms to increase women’s participation in entrepreneurship since women are valuable resources for economic development. In this special issue, Nor Hafizah and Noraida investigate women entrepreneurs’ experiences with patriarchal practices in their entrepreneurship activities in their article titled “‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’ and Entrepreneurship: Narratives of Malay Muslim Women Entrepreneurs in Malaysia”. By using the gender lens and Kandiyoti’s concept of bargaining with patriarchy, this article explores how women entrepreneurs are constantly negotiating and at the same time conforming to patriarchal norms to earn their own “space and freedom” in running and managing their business activities. The research findings reveal that women entrepreneurs must constantly juggle their time between performing their domestic duties and their entrepreneurship through the constant negotiations with and juggling of the gender roles and norms prescribed by society. This study localises Kandiyoti’s findings and show their relevance even in different times and space. At a practical level, the study argues that patriarchy continues to hinder women’s progress, particularly in economic activities and is a major barrier to women entrepreneurs’ development in business. The use of the gender lens in this study unravels the fact that in the face of patriarchy, Malay Muslim women entrepreneurs do not remain passive but consciously and constantly strategise and negotiate their way forward to improve their economic well-being.



Work-life balance (WLB) is an approach to work that is closely related to target 8.5 of Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) of the SDGs. Further, it is also an important consideration in achieving a gender balance in labour force participation, which is a concern of Goal 5 (gender equality). Due to existing social and gender norms, women, more than men, face challenges in balancing between family and work. In her article entitled, “Work-Life Balance for Sustainable Development in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions: Fad or Fact?”, Magdalene Ang examines work issues for women academics in Malaysian universities with a specific focus on WLB and coping mechanisms. Her study aims at documenting new developments in the areas of WLB and coping strategies for Malaysian workers, particularly women. While her study is, arguably, not generalisable to all women academicians and Malaysian universities, her findings are highly indicative of the magnified workplace expectations vis-a-vis academicians and how women in academia are specifically impacted by this new development. The women’s coping strategies are influenced by support they receive from spouses and families. They also maintain positive attitudes in facing work challenges by utilising a problem-focused strategy as opposed to an emotion-focused one. The findings in this study also indicate how support from workplace leadership, especially in subscribing to and practicing WLB in the organisation, helps sustain women’s physical and emotional well-being.

The article by Simon Moses Schleimer, “Educationally Successful Female Muslim Students in Present-Day Malaysia: Challenges, Chances and Change”, investigates the diversity of the lives of female Malay Muslim students in Malaysia by focusing on the questions of how they negotiate their lives and educational aspirations in the context of their family structures. Ensuring equal access to education for all girls and boys and women and men, is a core element of the targets in Goal 4 of the SDGs as well as of Goal 3 of the MDGs. This article contributes to understanding challenges faced by women in accessing higher education and achieving educational success. The discourse of diversity that this article brings in discussing women’s access to education highlights the context of intersectionality in women’s lived experiences. While being a woman, compared to a man, may already determine a person’s ability to pursue education in a society, other categories of analysis such as race, religion, family structures, socioeconomic background and academic ability also have interrelated influences. Schleimer finds that being a Malay and Muslim woman in Malaysia gives fewer restrictions in pursuing educational ambitions compared to academic ability and socioeconomic background. This study contributes to a better understanding of the lives of female Malay Muslim students and their educational ambitions and familial structures by taking an in-depth look at their educational achievements and dreams. The study shows that the lives of female Malay Muslim students in Malaysia do not reflect the stereotype about “Muslim women”. Instead, their lifestyles may be defined as

diverse and complex, and are not greatly different from the lifestyles of many other female students around the world.

Equal participation of both men and women in politics is an important requirement for effective democracy and good governance but it also vital to have equal representation of men and women at different decision-making levels. In politics, leadership positions have been occupied mainly by men. In the context of sustainable development, particularly of Goal 5 of SDGs, Malaysia has been quite remiss in achieving gender equality in the arena of politics and political decision-making. Studies conducted by various scholars point out many factors that hinder women's access to leadership positions even when women have been actively involved in politics. In her case study entitled "Discoursing Women's Political Participation Towards Achieving Sustainable Development: The Case of Women in Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)", Zaireeni presents her findings on women in Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) or better known as *Muslimat*. Part of her PhD research in 2017, she concludes that the women in her study do not attribute their lack of political participation and achievement to family and religion. Although *Muslimat* claim that they voluntarily decide on the extent of their participation, but deeper analyses of the findings show the interconnectedness between a patriarchal structure that assigns roles for women and men and the reactions and responses of women to these prescribed gender norms. Thus, the author discovers that women in PAS justify their lack of visibility in political leadership with their more intangible participation and achievements in promoting the welfare and spirituality of the communities on the ground. Being at the leadership helm is never their main agenda. Instead, spreading Islamic teaching is their sole purpose and PAS is seen as a tool to help them achieve their spiritual inspiration. As such the author believes that it is crucial for political parties specifically and the government in a wider context to plan strategies that can transform existing cultural and structural norms towards a more equal outlook on the issue of women's leadership.

Three chapters explicitly focus on women's well-being and their relationship with gender equality. Mohajer and Noraida in their article titled "The Role of Gender and Status in Communication between Doctors and Patients in Malaysian Context" investigate the ways in which gender and status of doctors and patients influence the effectiveness of communication in sustainable health development among Malaysians. This study applies conversation analysis to evaluate the linguistic elements in their talk. The findings indicate that gender of the interactants has effects on the interruption they make. In addition, status of the interactants is a determining factor in the interruption process. The findings of this study suggest that, listening skills and communication training for doctors can minimise miscommunication during consultation visits and enhance healthcare quality which ultimately assist to achieve sustainable health development goals.



Therefore, this study also suggests that providing training courses for doctors would make communication easier for both doctors and patients. Doctors should be trained linguistically to consider patients' right to speak and ask questions. In addition, they should be aware of the effect of gender as a determining factor in their communication and treatment process. Having an effective communication will create a more comfortable environment for patients to open and receive a satisfactory consultation which will help to improve public health in the long term.

Kartini and Nurshuhada's article titled "Midwives and Herbal Remedies: The Sustainable Ethnoscience" is an attempt to revisit the observation of midwives on herbal remedies and other healing processes after more than 30 years. The question remains whether this traditional practice including herbal intake for diet, bath and massage is sustained in this millennium society. The Malays have their ways of preserving the health of a mother after childbirth. The traditional terms are different from those of colonial medicine that require the evidence of empirical scientific data. However, the former accepts and acknowledges modern day medicine as necessary for women's vitality. Both approaches and practices are complementing one another and will continue to benefit women psychologically and physically. This study suggests that ethnoscience through traditional methods combined with modern practice is the context of growth and sustainability that allow the society to retain its belief and cultural existence. The modern acceptance of traditional methods rebuts the basic idea of modernisation meaning transformation from traditional to modern by removing or leaving the metaphysical realm for tangible scientific practices. The integration for sustainability of practices from traditional to modern evolves and fits according to local wisdom, belief systems, and cosmological principles.

After the study of food and postnatal care, the subsequent and final article, "Temiar Women Breastfeeding Experiences: A Journey to Empowerment" focuses on the issue of breastfeeding practices among the indigenous Temiar women. Sharifah Zahhura and Rozieyati's article argues that one of the important factors that influences a mother's decision to breastfeed and to continue it, is the mother's empowerment in breastfeeding. Empowerment of women increases breastfeeding rates and helps mothers in surviving and coping with breastfeeding problems and difficulties. These indigenous Temiar women were empowered in the breastfeeding practices through adequate knowledge and skills in overcoming problems and coping difficulties pertaining to breastfeeding. In addition, the family belief in the value of breastfeeding, maternal satisfaction and enjoyment in successful breastfeeding, and support from other surrounding people facilitates the women's empowerment in breastfeeding. Empowering women especially in breastfeeding practices will help protect or restore breastfeeding cultures among the Temiar women and others all around the world. It is hoped that their experiences

can be used to develop and devise comprehensive programmes with a focus on empowering women in breastfeeding and in efforts to bridge the gap of gender equality in communities, rural and urban alike.

## NOTE

1. The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development was initiated by the General Assembly in 1989 and it is published every five years.

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