



IFHE Statement on UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 With input from the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW)



ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

This Position Statement is intended as the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) and the Association for Country Women of the World (ACWW) contribution to the discussions on and success of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

Home Economics aims to improve the well-being of individuals, families and communities in all its dimensions of academic work and education more broadly and on all levels of pursuit including the daily life of families and the advocacy arena. The relationship between family members, their roles within and beyond the family, the division of work and especially the role of women are all an important focus. IFHE regards the empowerment of women and the work life balance in their everyday lives, as well as equality between men and women and girls and boys within households and in the broader economy and society, as essential conditions for future sustainable development and a good quality of life for all.

The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) is committed to raising the health and improving the livelihoods of rural women and their families world-wide. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls start at home therefore IFHE stresses the following conditions – peace, safety and security in the home; respect for women and girls; giving due recognition to their vital and reliable contribution to the economic stability and growth of their families and nation states; meeting the basic needs of individuals and families; managing health, crises and disaster related concerns that impact homes and communities; and engagement with sustainable development in the management of limited and diminishing resources.

Background

A two-degree Celsius rise in temperature may significantly increase hunger in 2050, thereby having dire consequences on the 70% of poverty-stricken people living in sub-Saharan Africa, whose livelihoods depend on rain-fed agriculture, as well as on populations in other regions (FAO 2016).

The goals and targets of the SDGs reflect gender equality considerations in an integrated manner, such as the gender dimensions of poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), health (SDG 3) and water and sanitation (SDG 6). How are these evident for women?

While some progress has been achieved towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue to suffer from discrimination and violence in every part of the world, often described as the mis-interpretation of cultural (religious) texts (UN ECOSOC 2016). According to the UN Women report (2014), women, especially in rural contexts, were left behind in any progress toward achieving the MDGs. This is despite emphasis on the situation of rural women and their role in agricultural development and food production since the World Food Conference 1974, which led in subsequent years to the drafting of Article 14 on rural women in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Convention, adopted in 1979) (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979), while all rights under the CEDAW Convention apply as well to rural women. In 2016, the General Recommendation (GR) No. 34 was issued by the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), clarifying State obligations to recognize, promote and protect the rights of rural women, with a focus on article 14 of the CEDAW Convention (CEDAW, General Recommendation no. 34 2016). It is however problematic that the focus was mainly on rural women's economic empowerment, and prevented a more holistic view on broader power structures at the macro-level and global levels. This further led to reinforcement of certain myths with regard to rural women's food security status and land rights, with partly exaggerated negative figures, and a one-sided and limited view on discrimination of women through customary norms (Doss *et al.* 2017).

SDG 5 is the stand-alone gender specific goal concerned with gender equality and women's empowerment. It consists of nine targets (UN DESA 2016):

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 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.

- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as to children, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 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.
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- 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, as well as the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- 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.
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.
- 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.

Drawing on recent work within the UN Women report (2014) sustainable development means economic, social and environmental development that ensures human well-being and dignity, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice, in current and future time (UN Women 2014). This understanding echoes the definition proposed in the landmark report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) that argued for sustainable development to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (A/42/427, annex). Given the central role what women and girls play supporting their families and their communities, there is a need to underline how questions of equality and justice are important for present as well as future generations (UN Women 2014).

Relation to Home Economics, IFHE and IFHE Members

Home Economics is a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences, that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living conditions for individuals, families and communities.

In the 21st century, Home Economics extended its context from the private household to the broader society and environment, because the capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, beyond the individual and household, to the local and global (glocal) communities.

The content (disciplinary bases) from which studies of Home Economics draw is dependent upon the specific context, but might include, among others: food, nutrition and health; textiles and clothing; shelter and housing; consumerism and consumer science; household management; design and technology; food science and hospitality management; human development and family studies; education and community services. The capacity to draw from such disciplinary diversity is a strength of the profession, allowing for the development of specific interpretations of the field, as relevant to the context.

This disciplinary diversity coupled with the aim of achieving optimal and sustainable living conditions for all means that Home Economics has the potential to be influential in all sectors of society, contributing to the transformation of political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems, at every level.

The IFHE (2008) Position Statement shows how Home Economics can be identified by its “four main areas of practice”. Firstly, it is an academic discipline that educates new scholars and professionals, who conduct research, and create new knowledge and ways of thinking. Secondly, it focuses on the arena of everyday living where people’s basic human needs are met and where people develop human growth and potential. Thirdly, Home Economics is a curriculum area that teaches students how to develop and strengthen their capabilities by preparing them for life, and to be Home Economics professionals. Finally, as a fourth dimension, Home Economics manifests in the societal arena where it influences and develops policy to enable families to achieve empowerment, well-being, transformation and sustainable futures (IFHE, 2008).

Home Economists emphasise the importance of all targets of the SDG 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. From their professional background, Home Economists have a special focus on women’s empowerment and supporting equality between women and men.

Theories of the household affirm that a household is run by a group of members, who work cooperatively to fulfil its needs. As a group, household members have a social relationship with each other and interact to achieve their individual and collective aims. There is considerable benefit to be gained by sharing the tasks within and outside the household.

In reality however, the household unit often does not distribute resources equally. Intra-household decision-making, resource allocation and the division of work depend on various power relations within households, which are influenced by the social and cultural factors, often regarding men as household head, and the family members' individual attitudes. There is ample evidence that, if households are built on equal partnerships of women and men – whether they are living together as a couple, or in other family units, such as sibling or multiple-generation households -, and where there is a sharing of responsibilities of various household tasks, these households also provide a supportive environment for equitable decision-making and socialising of children. Social norms that restrict women to a role as housekeeper and mother limit personal rights and pose barriers to women unfolding their potential, to the detriment of their families and communities.

Home Economists advocate for changing these norms and perceptions and support the transformation of gender roles and relations, from the household to the policymaking levels. While there are increased awareness and efforts to include women in decision-making at different levels, without a systemic approach and transformation of the society as a whole, women will continue to be instrumentalised and overly exhausted within the current frameworks of (predominantly economic) empowerment (Alston, 2009; Lemke and Bellows, 2016).

Barriers to participation that women in many societies are facing need to be acknowledged and overcome by strengthening women's rights, including the rights of women-headed households. Further, it is critical not to focus on women as a "vulnerable" group in isolation from decisive structural issues at the household and community levels. Men should be integrated into related research and programming, recognising that not doing so perpetuates women's "burden" of food- or child care-related labours. To do otherwise is to remain blind to the potential, real, and desperate need for men's changing identities and masculinities. In addition to gender, other social dynamics such as age, social status, ethnicity and race also need to be taken into account in order to reveal and more clearly differentiate hierarchies among women and men and their different social locations (Lemke and Bellows, 2016).

Home Economists acknowledge the importance of gender equality in education, employment and business. However, gender equality in education or employment cannot be reached, if there is no gender equality in the private sphere of the home. The private household is the nursery for public actions, behaviours and attitudes. Practiced equity must be acknowledged among the diverse actors at the household level, so that these values can be confidently pursued and embraced outside the private sphere.

Unpaid and Domestic Work – Workload of Women

From its foundation, Home Economics engages with studies related to time, work and resource management in households. Research shows that in most countries of the world, the major part of the unpaid work at home, i.e. cooking meals, child care and care for relatives, is done by women, even if they also participate in paid work outside the private sphere. The everyday tasks of women are multifaceted. They care for children, sick members of the family, the elderly and the disabled. They clean the house, wash clothes, prepare meals and contribute to the household food production and income generation. For example, women comprise on average 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and produce more food for household consumption than men; however, they are often regarded as family members who “help with farming” (FAO 2011).

Women often perform the most labour-intensive agricultural tasks such as planting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing and produce up to 80% of the food in some African countries. They are further overrepresented in low paid work such as part-time and seasonal work (FAO, 2011). As a result, women often suffer the triple burden of domestic work, paid work, with their wages being lower than those of men, and child/relative care work.

Unpaid care and domestic work are not adequately recognised and valued, and do not lead to a sufficient pension (UN General Assembly, 2013). In all countries women need to be unburdened from having the sole responsibility for child care, family management and housekeeping. Because women biologically bear children, girls continue to be socialised into this role. There is a need to respect and recognise, also in monetary terms, women’s vital contribution to wider societal development and sustainability.

Equal Rights for Men and Women – Access to Resources, Land and Leadership

Women are heads of increasing numbers of households worldwide. Many households are dependent on female income, either as sole income or as significant supplement to the family income.

Poor families headed by women in developing countries, especially in rural areas, are facing poverty, malnutrition and exclusion, loss of status and lack of land rights. National laws and policies support discriminatory and disenfranchising social norms and practices against women, including inheritance laws. Women need full access to ownership and control over land and other natural resources, and equal rights to economic resources, financial services, credit and inheritance rights to succeed (UN HRC, 2012).

Even in those countries where laws are in place that ascribe equal rights for men and women, women are still discriminated in many ways (Quisumbing, 2010). For example, when governments enact austerity cuts they often have a disproportionate effect on women (Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019).

Women's role in the production and consumption of resources to meet basic needs and provision of family care is crucial for improving economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage resources and landscapes. This is necessary to produce food, to achieve food and nutrition security, and to have access to safe water.

Equal rights for women also lead to a reduced workload and improved health and well-being for the whole family, including the opportunity to send children to school and improving the education of women. Mothers have an important role in passing on nurturing skills and imparting emotional intelligence to their children; therefore, early separation of girl and boy children from their mothers should be discouraged and single mothers should have equal parental rights and be supported by society at large.

To avoid the triple burden of women requires a shift in thinking and transformation of gender roles, including more active involvement of men and other household members, as well as adequate support structures from the state.

The implementation of equal legal rights will enable both women and men to be partners in controlling, using and managing natural resources in ways that sustain livelihoods and well-being for all. This requires that women are equally involved in decision-making at all levels: in the private household, within community councils, in the work environment, and at policy level.

Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls often starts at home, in families and communities, and is influenced by culture and traditions. Women and girls face different kinds of physical, biological and psychological violence, including sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, child marriage and rape.

From a Home Economics perspective, the family and the home are the place of regeneration and recreation. It is the place to fulfil basic needs, especially the need for protection and security.

Home Economists demand the protection of women and girls, especially at home, and highlight the home as a place of security, comfort and peace of mind for all. Women need access to social protection services, and specific strategies are needed to ensure that women living in remote rural areas have access to these services.

Home Economics Education to advance Gender Education

Given the multifaceted tasks of women at the private home and in the public sphere, for example in income generation, it is reiterated here that women must have access to high-quality education as well as to household technologies and Home Economics knowledge and skills. There is a need for women to be educated in information and communication technology, in order to obtain access to information and innovation, to be able to contribute to regional, national and global development, and participate in a modern information age. Women and girls need access to primary, secondary and higher education as well as education for employment and business.

When girls and women have the opportunity to develop a range of skills and experience equal opportunities there is also a concurrent improvement in the quality of life at home. Having a comprehensive education in everyday life management, resource management and the economy, and being aware of their legal rights provides women with the capacity to demonstrate their full potential to contribute to a sustainable future and to their own as well as their families' development.

Examples of Accomplishments of IFHE and Remaining Challenges

Articulated in the IFHE Position Statement 2008 (IFHE Position Statement 2008), Home Economics focuses on the arena of everyday living, on how people's basic human needs are met and how people develop human growth and potential. Home Economists around the world conduct projects to improve the quality of life with a focus on women and girls. Examples, collected and published by the IFHE, demonstrate both the range of locations and effects of these projects (IFHE, 2012).

The ACWW's Women-to-Women projects also provide evidence of the benefits of projects undertaken with women as partners and can be retrieved at the ACWW website (<http://www.acww.org.uk/>).

These projects demonstrate the significance of Home Economics Education and training for sustainable development and the improvement of life for families and, most of all, women and children. In Home Economics extension programs people are educated how to manage land and water resources to secure food and nutrition security and livelihoods.

Women holding enhanced skills in the areas of hygiene, use of clean energy sources for cooking, use of natural resources, gardening and family farming, food processing and nutrition, are able to improve the food security and health situation of their family members.

Further, skills in household financial management and sustainable purchasing improve the spending and income generation side of a household budget. For example, Home Economics organisations support women's cooperatives and women groups through micro financing. As evidence shows, women and men as well as the whole family, benefit from such effort and projects.

IFHE and ACWW advocate for Empowerment of Women

As a longstanding International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO), the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is a global network of Home Economics experts. It has consultative services with several United Nations organisations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO). IFHE is in a position to contribute to the SDGs by empowering individuals, families, and communities with the skills necessary to build a just society.

For many years, concerns for women and girls, gender equality and women's empowerment have been consistently on the IFHE Agenda. The IFHE continues to highlight the relevance of women's and girl's everyday-life education and sustainable development to influence the United Nations and its stakeholders, other NGOs and Associations.

IFHE has published several statements based on research results and successful projects at the UN, NGO Working groups and conferences to spread the Home Economics involvement and significance.

IFHE is a partner of the Global Alliance for Clean Cooking, a member of the Global Alliance for Health Promotion and participant of the Zero Hunger Challenge. ACWW has “Special Consultative” status with ECOSOC and has also signed up to the Zero Hunger Challenge. Both especially focus on health and food issues targeting women.

A Way forward: Expectations and Recommendations for Policymakers

Following the Beijing Platform for Action and the aims set by the Development Agenda through the SDGs, and SDG 5 in particular, the IFHE recommends the following:

- Recognise and support the important role and the high, often under-utilised productive potential of women as key players for reaching sustainable development goals.
- Ensure that all girls and women of the world receive education to improve their everyday life management for the benefit of their household members and communities.
- Build on partnerships between women and men to achieve development opportunities for the whole community.
- Promote the gender equality agenda to improve women’s access to financial capital, natural resources such as land, credit, technology, information, technical assistance and training.
- Strengthen the empowerment of women as key actors for social, economic, environmental and sustainable development.
- Acknowledge the importance of education in Home Economics subjects to improve food security, eradicate poverty, and improve quality of life.
- To ensure that rural women are not left behind by the SDGs, all data relating to gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment should be dis-aggregated between rural and urban women.

Recommendations for Home Economists

In addition, ACWW points out that these recommendations must be linked to the indicators, which are used to measure the progress in achieving the targets. The indicators of the FAO related to SDG 5 are: 1 % of people with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land by sex; 2 % of countries where the legal framework guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control.

Recommendations:

- Maintain an advocacy role in respective countries through Planning and Development agencies, Ministries with responsibilities for agriculture, child welfare, economic and social well-being, health and education, communication and technologies and labour and compensation equity, among other relevant agencies.
- Partner with other NGOs to strengthen the call by the UN to improve the lives of women and children for the universal development of families in a progressively sustained way.
- Use research agendas and publication activities to publicise undesirable social practices of discrimination against all gender groups.
- Devise creative solutions to the existing problems and practice and promote such solutions in visible ways both at personal, community and national levels as appropriate.
- Promote gender equality in private homes, communities and in the societies at large in a contextually relevant manner.
- Promote boys' and girls' access to quality Home Economics Education at all levels, starting with primary education.
- Enhance the role of women in economic development through vocational education and training in Home Economics-related fields.

Closing

In recent years, the synergies between gender equality, women's empowerment and various levels of sustainability, i.e., economic, social and environmental, has been increasingly acknowledged. The important multifaceted role of women and girls in the household, community and larger society underlines the need to empower them through education in day-to-day life management, in resource management and in increasing their economic capacity through access to vocational training. Gender equality and empowerment begins with respect for women and girls. This includes their contributions to the private home, the wider community and for a transformed and more humane society. Societies that empower women give them equal legal rights, access to resources including land ownership, create policies that remove all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and ensure that boys are not alienated but grow up valuing and respecting women and girls.

These are the conditions for women to reach their full potential and achieve sustainable development. IFHE demands that women and girls are empowered at all levels and in all spheres of society, that their needs and especially their human rights remain a central focus in policies, and that they are provided with the opportunity to harness their potential and contribute to sustainable development.

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