



GENDER JUSTICE: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

WE LIVE IN A RICH WORLD. YET MORE THAN A BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY, AND THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR IS WIDENING. GENDER IS A MAIN PREDICTOR FOR WHO WILL BE POOR AND WHO WILL HAVE POWER.

Gender Justice is the goal of full equality and equity among women and girls and men and boys in all spheres of life. It is the result of women, jointly – and on an equal basis with men – defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. It is both an outcome and a process.

GENDER JUSTICE REQUIRES WE WORK TOGETHER ON TWO LEVELS

- ▶ To change societal attitudes and behaviour that lie at the heart of gender inequality;
- ▶ To change those laws, policies and government programs that discriminate against women and sustain gender inequality.

If you don't deal with gender justice issues you are only dealing with fifty percent of the problem. You still have to go back and deal with the other half.

Teresa Mugadza,
Zimbabwean feminist and
human rights activist

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

**OXFAM'S WORK ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IS FOCUSED ON THREE AREAS:
LABOUR RIGHTS, FOOD AND LAND RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE.**

LABOUR RIGHTS

Around the world, women work on average more hours than men, sometimes double. This work is often unrecognized and unpaid, especially in the care economy. Sixty per cent of the world's working poor are women, predominately employed in the informal economy where wages are low and where benefits and protection are non-existent. Oxfam works alongside local women workers and activists, such as the Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Working and Unemployed Women in Nicaragua, to establish and enforce policies and laws that end discrimination, ensure a living wage and protect women in the workplace.

FOOD AND LAND RIGHTS

One in seven people in the world go to bed hungry. The majority are women and girls. At issue are deep imbalances in opportunity and control of resources. Recent studies have found that if women had access to the same supports as men (land, credit and services) food production could increase exponentially. Women produce between 60 and 80 per cent of the food in many developing countries. Oxfam works with local partners to increase women's access to resources and decision making relating to policies they need to have a sustainable livelihood.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Poor women are least responsible for climate change and most burdened by the impact. Existing gender inequalities compound women's vulnerability to climate change and undermine their ability to adapt. Climate change increases women's burden in rural households, adding to the time they must spend collecting food, fuel and water, and reducing time spent on education or income generation. Oxfam Canada is working with local partners to ensure women's knowledge, resources and practices are included in climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, while also influencing Canadian government policies at UN climate change negotiations.

Oxfam Canada uses a rights-based, transformative approach to strengthen women and girls' capacity to mobilize their own power and that of others. We support people in realizing their basic human rights through transformational change, which creates a fundamental and lasting improvement in women's lives.

STORIES FROM OXFAM CANADA'S PARTNERS

Similar threads run through many of our partner's stories, beginning with the importance of women coming together in an organized way to share, learn and support each other. This often leads to a pooling of resources – seeds, training workshops, credit, food marketing – and leadership opportunities. From Mozambique to Cuba to Indonesia, women who have benefitted from Oxfam programs tell of improved economic livelihoods and transformation in their personal self – a sense of empowerment, independence and respect from others that spills over into other parts of their lives.

KEMBATTA MENTTI GEZZIMMA (KMG), ETHIOPIA

Saving two cents a week changed Yeshiwork Mabri's life. For two years, she saved at least two cents of her weekly profit from selling produce in Angacha, the Kembatta region of Ethiopia, where people make their living as small-scale farmers.

After years of struggling to provide for her nine children, Yeshiwork joined Oxfam's partner organization, KMG. Its micro-credit program has successfully enabled local women to share their resources and build their self-reliance. In the space of a few years, the women in KMG have grown from a group of 35, who in their first year managed to save 5,225 birr (C\$325), to a group of 85 with 46,600 birr (C\$2,410) in capital.

By Canadian standards the sums are small, but for these women, their wealth is a source of great pride – and power. By saving and investing in one another, they are growing and diversifying their incomes, improving their livelihoods and their family’s nutrition and ensuring their daughters get an education.

A widow in the group shares her story. “When I went to the first meeting it was for food. I was asking ‘What can I get?’ We thought bread was in other people’s pockets. We didn’t know it was in our own. Now we are our own boss. We have savings and skills. We’ve saved more than we had ever dreamed possible. And now some of our children are going to college.”

KMG works on a variety of issues to transform the lives of women, from successfully lowering incidents of female genital mutilation by 97 percent in the region where they first began their work, to economic empowerment.



GANNA UNNAYAN KENDRA, BANGLADESH

Sahena Begum is spearheading community efforts to cope with changing weather in Kunderpara village, Bangladesh. Although the annual monsoon rains are getting heavier and more unpredictable, her efforts are bringing about enormous progress.

In Bangladesh, it is usually women who collect water and fuel, grow and prepare food and care for their families – all tasks that become more difficult when disaster strikes. So Sahena, president of the local committee, is helping women prepare for floods. “If women are aware, then families can be saved from many losses,” she says. “Diseases can be avoided, poultry can be saved, the children are properly looked after and don’t suffer diseases, and the women themselves are saved from a lot of suffering.”



She was trained in disaster protection by Gana Unnayan Kendra, a local Oxfam partner, and now encourages members of the community to store portable clay ovens and wood in high places to use during floods. She helps grow and preserve vegetables and keep seeds that can be planted when crops are destroyed. Vital work is also undertaken to help people raise the foundations of their homes above flood levels.

“At the beginning many people in my family did not support me,” she remembers. “My husband and my husband’s brother tried to stop me.” But she refused to stop and now works to ensure women are included in community decisions, which is changing attitudes about climate change, about women and about what is possible. Sahena is part of Oxfam’s Sisters of the Planet series.

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