

‘My wife and I run our business together’
Achieving a more sustainable world by involving men in the
reduction of gender inequality at a household level

Wessel van den Berg
March 2007

PART A: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the effect of gender inequality on sustainable development.

Through the literature review I explore the notion that inequality, specifically gender inequality, has an adverse effect on the sustainable development of one of the smallest possible units where inequality can occur, namely the household. In this essay a deductive approach of reasoning will be followed. The literature review in the first section will be used to inform a practical case study discussed in the second section.

The main frame of reference for the context of sustainability draws on the environmental space approach. According to this approach, sustainability encompasses both the reduction in consumption levels necessary for resource maintenance and the increase of consumption levels to a state of minimum quality of life (McLaren, 2003).

The focus will be on the global population of women who live below the line of human dignity and quality of life. The status of women will be examined in the light of global research and monitoring conducted mainly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

One response to gender inequality, namely developmental work with men and boys, will be investigated. This relatively new field will be examined according to global commitments and declarations made by activists and forums, working for the empowerment of women, and which also depend on several United Nations (UN) declarations.

A simple combination of indicators of sustainability, drawn from the environmental space approach, and indicators of gender inequality, drawn from global UN-based research, will be chosen. This set of indicators will then be used to discuss an appropriate case study where the notion will be tested against real examples of a household and the effect of the participation of the male partner of the household in a developmental programme.

EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

McLaren (2003:19) states that equity and social justice considerations are essential for sustainable development. This statement is substantiated by examining the field of equity in the context of sustainable development below.

The approach to sustainable development that applies in this essay

A wide and dynamic range of approaches to the idea of sustainable development exists: there is no single, all-encompassing, acknowledged definition of sustainable development, and the meaning of the term itself is constantly developing (Pezzoli, 1997:549; Gallopin, 2003:20).

Two broad extremes are found with the ecocentric approach to sustainable development on the one hand and the anthropocentric approach on the other. The ecocentric approach sees the whole of nature as worthy of being sustained, with human life as a part of this wider system, of ‘...life on earth in general, and not only human life’ (Hattingh, 2001:9). The anthropocentric approach is focused particularly on sustaining human quality of life and ensuring this quality for future generations in ‘maintaining nature as a basis of our social activities for generations to come’ (Achterberg, 1994:136 in Hattingh, 2001:1).

In exploring matters concerning social equity in this essay, I shall approach the question of achieving a more sustainable world from an anthropocentric standpoint, proceeding from the well-known Brundtland definition of sustainable development contained in the report named ‘Our Common Future’ delivered by the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Brundtland in 1987:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”
(WCED, 1987:43)

This definition has been placed in the anthropocentric side of the field of sustainable development since it encompasses human needs and assumes the availability of natural resources for the provision of these needs (Hattingh, 2001:5).

Equity as an important factor in sustainable development

The Brundtland definition addresses inter-generational equity, in other words, justice between different generations. The first part of the definition however, regarding meeting the needs of present generations, raises the question of intra-generational equity, which ‘... is concerned with the reduction of resource disparities among those presently living today’ (Gallopin, 2003:20).

Equity falls within the social perspective on sustainable development. In this essay the definition of equity is “the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone” (Collins, 2001). Social justice and equity has been recognized as one of the key spheres of concern within the range of literature on sustainable

development (Pezzoli, 1997:555). Along with ecological integrity and economic security, social equity is seen as one of the three main ideals of sustainable development. These three ideals are often diagrammatically shown as three intersecting spheres representing the “three mutually reinforcing and critical aims of sustainable development: the improvement of human well-being; more equitable distribution of resource use benefits across and within societies; and development that ensures ecological integrity over intergenerational timescales” (Sneddon, Howarth & Norgaard, 2004:256).

It is important to note, as emphasized in the document *Planet-Prosperity-People, a Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development in SA*, that a more accurate approach could be found by viewing the three aspects as being embedded within one another, in other words as economy embedded within socio-political systems that in turn are embedded within the ecology. This perspective prevents a perception such as that social matters can exist outside ecological concerns (RSA, 2006:19).

In this context I approach economic concerns from a starting point of examining equity as an essential part of sustainable development.

Gender equity

Intra-generational equity includes a wide range of “equitable distributions of resource use benefits” (Sneddon et al., 2004:256) like class, gender and race concerns. “The benefits of current rates of resource use go mainly to a rich minority, and the costs ... are borne disproportionately by poorer people” (McLaren, 2003:21).

In the context of sustainable development the idea of equity amongst those living at any one particular time goes beyond concerns of resource use benefits. Equity includes the distribution of the burden of negative impacts of poorly managed resources amongst particular groupings. Mies and Shiva, using the example of gender equity and the status of women, comment in the following way: ‘We saw that the impact on women of ecological disasters and deterioration was harder than on men, and also, that everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction’ (1993:2-3).

The reduction of consumption levels is often seen as a main requirement for sustainable development. The useful quantitative measure of ecological footprinting illustrates this well. However, if one applies the footprinting exercise to poorer suburbs, a different dynamic to the assumed general reduction in consumption emerges. There is a radical difference in levels of consumption to be seen between middle-class suburbs and poor suburbs. For example, the richest suburbs in Cape Town have a footprint of 14 planets while the poorest suburbs have a footprint of less than one planet (RSA, 2006:20). In relation to these suburbs there is a strong case to be made for the increase of consumption levels to enable the move beyond poverty. Bearing this in mind, I shall discuss resource use and consumption as key issues related to the status of women as equal members of society, with particular emphasis on the consumption levels that women enjoy or are denied by their social status.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SPACE APPROACH TO EQUITY

The issue of low consumption levels within poverty-stricken areas raises a particular question concerning human dignity. If the definition of sustainable development stated above is used, one can query the sustainability of people living at very low consumption levels, especially in close proximity to such high consumption levels as found in a country like South Africa. How much and how well are the needs of present generations, and future generations, being met when communities are living at the lowest consumption levels that are humanly possible? Eradicating poverty would necessarily require the increase of consumption levels of poor people. However “[i]t is highly unlikely that there are sufficient resources to eradicate poverty by increasing the footprint of the poor if the footprint of the rich remains so large” (RSA, 2006:20).

An approach to sustainable development that elucidates this question is the environmental space approach.

The limits of equal consumption

The international environmental network Friends of the Earth has led the development of global measures of environmental capacity or “environmental space”. The environmental space approach defines a “living space” that is truly sustainable between two boundaries of consumption: a maximum and a minimum level of consumption. Hereby it combines the field of defining natural resource limits with the field of establishing inter- and intra-generational equity amongst all consumers (McLaren, 2003:22).

Maximum consumption

In this approach the maximum global level of consumption is determined by dividing the resources that are naturally available, and equally proportioned, amongst all consumers of these resources. The maximum limits are then set, broadly speaking, with environmental indicators of actual amounts of resource supply. Wastes and impacts of resource flows are incorporated as limiting factors in resource use (McLaren, 2003:23).

The steps in an environmental space allocation are as follows:

Global sustainable use is determined by estimating the annual global use that avoids breaking the defined limiting constraints on that resource. A “fair share” per person globally is then calculated based on predicted population totals and applied nationally. Current national consumption of that resource is estimated.

A comparison is then made between the “fair share” use and current use. Reduction rates are determined should the consumption reduce. Conversely, increase rates are determined if increase is desirable (McLaren, 2003:23).

Minimum consumption

Quality of life and minimum needs dictate a minimum level of consumption. As mentioned above, the eradication of poverty would require an increase in the levels of consumption by the poor. Poverty eradication is often seen as central to the achievement of sustainable development, as emphasised by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (RSA, 2006:22).

On a global level, increasing the consumption levels of developing countries and poorer populations does not merely require the redefinition of resource management. It is different from the way in which economic management is conducted. There are other factors to consider. The main example would be the redistribution of so-called northern resources to so-called southern developing countries. It is not as simple as that. Power-relations have to be taken into account when exploring this notion (McLaren, 2003:21).

This example of the importance of power relations when discussing equity is a demonstration on a macro-economic and global level. It is, however, also true on a micro level of the household when one considers the power-relations in which women and their partners are involved when equity issues are at stake. Up to now the discussion has focused on considerations of equity, namely the quality of being fair and reasonable. It now moves to include notions of equality and inequality, where equality is “the same status, rights and responsibilities for all the members of a society, group, or family” (Collins, 2001).

Sen (2001) comments on this issue in the following way:

There are, often enough, basic inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household, which can take many different forms. Even in cases in which there are no overt signs of anti-female bias in, say, survival or son-preference or education, or even in promotion to higher executive positions, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care.

On a micro level this statement indicates some of the challenges that women face when attempting to cross the lower threshold of consumption and enter a level of consumption that is considered a minimum level of quality of life. This would require them to step out of poverty. According to a UNDP document on this matter, most of the world’s population who were living in poverty in 2006 were women (UNDP, 2006b).

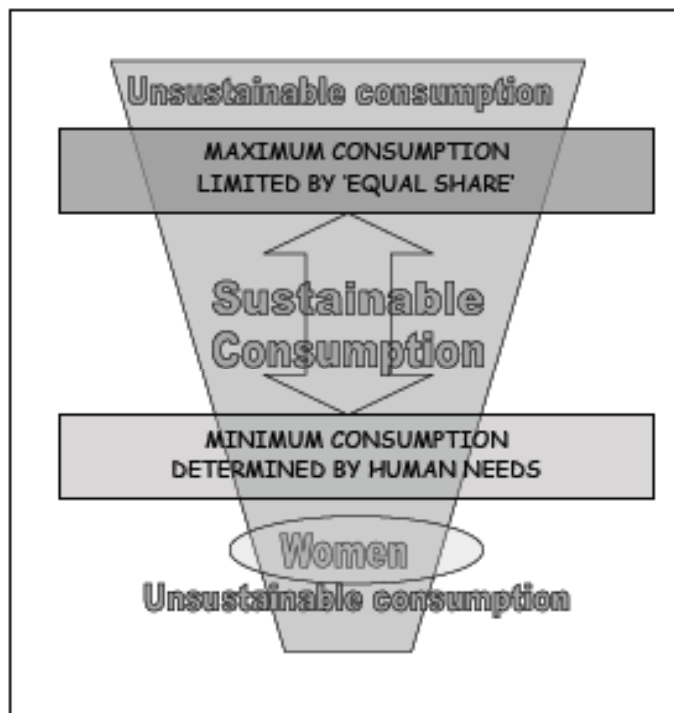


Figure 1: The current status of women living below the minimum line of consumption

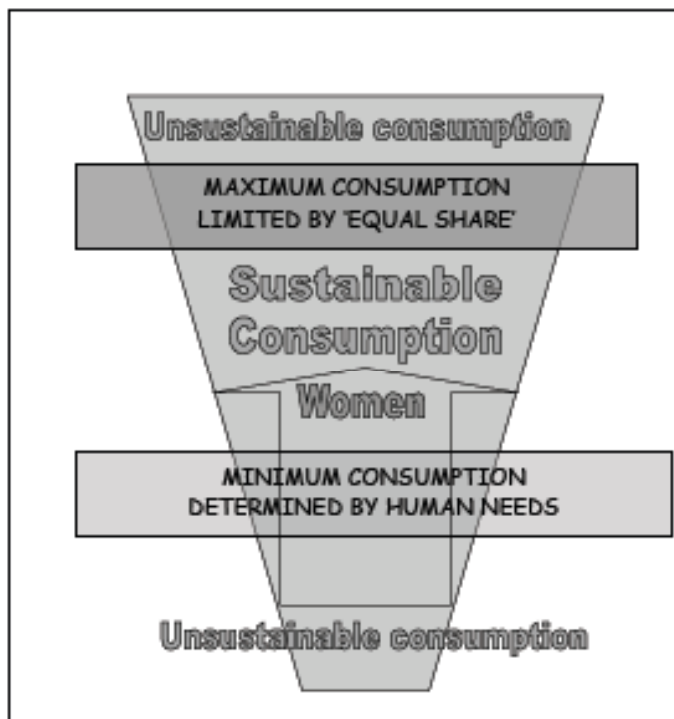


Figure 2: Women have moved to a more sustainable status

Assumptions and relevant arguments

It is important to name some assumptions and arguments that could be made when considering equity and environmental space as ways to discuss sustainable development, specifically when referring to increased consumption.

A popular assumption that is often made is that increased wealth leads to a better quality of life. Empirical evidence actually demonstrates that there is no direct correlation between income and quality of life. This is valid when viewed across all levels of income (Veenhoven, 1987; Seabrook, 1994 in McLaren 2003:21). Above a certain level of income other factors play a more significant role in determining quality of life, especially in terms of health (Oswald, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996 in McLaren 2003:21). This is important to note in the context of this essay as I am discussing women's increased quality of life. Access to healthcare by women is often compromised in certain contexts by their partners (Pettifor, Rees & Stevens, 2004 in Peacock, n.d.).

On the macro level, a global argument often raised against increased consumption rates by the poor is that developing countries have little capacity to increase consumption. Population growth rates enter the conversation here in the context of potential equitable distribution. Historically, however, evidence has shown that population growth rates decline with increased consumption. This is due to a complex set of functions including improved education, increased economic security and greater equality between the sexes (McLaren, 2003:26). For the purpose of our discussion these facts demonstrate that consumption itself consists of a complex field of dynamics and should not be taken at face value to be either purely negative or purely positive.

The environmental space approach has valuable contributions to make to equity in this broad sense. Particularly when applied to the role and plight of women it also carries meaning, as articulated by McLaren (2003:25):

Like women's movements in the global South, the environmental space approach rejects the crude assumption that population growth is at the root of the problem, and that a coercive approach to population control can be justified to solve environmental problems. *On the other hand it assumes that increasing justice for women, including access to education, livelihoods, resources and fertility control, will help reduce future population growth, as well as reducing inequity.* (My italics.)

THE ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

In the Overview of the Human Development Report of 1995 the statement is made that "[i]n no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men" (UNDP, 1995:2). The report continues to examine the status of women and makes a strong case for the inclusion of gender equality as a major goal of development (UNDP, 1995:10).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) is introduced and used as an instrument to investigate the relationships of gender inequalities to human development (UNDP, 1995: 2). In 1995 the Beijing Declaration on the status of women was published during the Fourth World Conference on Women. Various Human Development Reports have since 1995 included the GDI as a measure and published comparative data related to the Human Development Index (HDI). The United Nations has also established and convened regular meetings of the International Commission on the Status of Women (Peacock, n.d.).

Some frameworks for examining gender inequality

Since the 1995 report a variety of approaches and definitions for dealing with gender inequality have been both continued and developed anew. Gender inequality has persisted as an important issue into the twenty-first century (Sen, 2001).

Two years before the 1995 UN Human Development Report, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights was adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993. It is useful to revisit this declaration as the 1995 report does, since it names different dimensions of equal enjoyment of human rights (UNDP, 1995:1).

Some dimensions from the 1993 Vienna declaration named in the 1995 United Nations Human Development Report are:

- Equal access to basic social services including education and health
- Equal opportunities for participation in political and economic decision making
- Equal reward for equal work
- Equal protection under the law
- Elimination of discrimination by gender and violence against women
- Equal rights of citizens in all areas of life, both public –such as the workplace – and private – such as the home.

The specific indicators used to compile the GDI of each country are based on figures comparing different statistics related to men and women. The four indicators are firstly male and female life expectancies at birth, secondly male and female adult literacy rates, thirdly male and female combined gross enrolment ratios for primary, secondary and tertiary schools and fourthly estimated earned income (UNDP, 2006a:363).

When discussing the different dimensions of gender equality one cannot exclude the work done by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. He has recognized seven different types of gender inequality and discusses them in an article aptly named ‘The Many Faces of Gender Inequality’ (Sen, 2001). He names them as:

- Mortality inequality
- Natality inequality
- Basic facility inequality
- Special opportunity inequality

- Professional inequality
- Ownership inequality
- Household inequality.

I shall return to these types and dimensions of inequality later in the applied case study. In the paragraph above, the diverse and complex nature of gender inequality is highlighted. Bearing in mind the importance of equality and equity to sustainable development mentioned above, a picture begins to emerge of the wide field of application and exploration of equity and the plight of women in sustainable development. It is a complex problem with no single solution (Mies & Siva, 1993:1).

Income is “not the decisive factor of equality”

Income is often seen as an important factor in gender inequality. It is one of a set of indicators that might be used but it is “not the decisive factor of equality” (UNDP, 1995:2). This was demonstrated in the 1995 Human Development Report when National Gender Development Index ranks were applied to income levels. The result showed that high income does not remove gender inequalities. In other words, “gender equality can be pursued – and it has been – at all levels of income” (UNDP, 1995:3).

The comparison between women’s and men’s levels of income is significant since it provides “a reflection of the much lower participation of women in the labour force and their lower average wage”. (UNDP, 1995:3). The inequality in levels of income forms only one of the examples of inequality quoted in the report showing that women are disadvantaged. This is significant in the context of sustainable development if we remember that historical evidence shows that quality of life does not only depend on level of income (Oswald, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996 in McLaren, 2003:21).

Specifically women’s lack of access to opportunities was demonstrated by the 1995 Human Development Report. Most of those living in poverty were women: “of 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70% are women” (UNDP, 1995:4).

From an environmental space perspective it is clear that most of those living below the bottom threshold of human dignity in terms of low levels of consumption are women. Furthermore, the largest part of the world’s population who still have to cross the line from low quality of life to an existence above the minimum threshold of consumption are women (UNDP, 2006a).

This clearly places gender equality as a major goal for all human development, which would naturally include sustainable development.

Gender equality as a major goal of development

In 2006 the United Nations Development Programme published a report named ‘Taking Gender Equality Seriously’. From the following excerpt from this report it is clear that not much progress has been made in improving the status of women since 1995:

- Of the world's one billion poorest people, three-fifths are women and girls.
- Of the 960 million adults in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are women.
- Seventy percent of the 130 million children who are out of school are girls.
- With notable exceptions, such as Rwanda and the Nordic countries, women are conspicuously absent from parliaments, making up, on average, only 16 percent of parliamentarians worldwide.
- Women everywhere typically earn less than men, both because they are concentrated in low-paying jobs and because they earn less for the same work.
- Although women spend about 70 percent of their unpaid time caring for family members, that contribution to the global economy remains invisible.
- Up to half of all adult women have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners.
- Systematic sexual violence against women has characterized almost all recent armed conflicts and is used as a tool of terror and 'ethnic cleansing'.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 57 percent of those living with HIV are women, and young women aged 15-24 are at least three times more likely to be infected than men of the same age.
- Each year, half a million women die and 18 million more suffer chronic disability from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

(UNDP, 2006b: 3)

The report states that “[i]f development progress is best measured by how well the freedoms of people have been enhanced, then gender-disaggregated statistics show how very far we have to go” (UNDP, 2006b:3). Gender equality has also become one of the important developmental goals stated by the UNDP in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Millennium Development Goal 3 is “to promote gender equality and empower women”. However, the UNDP clearly acknowledges that the “dramatic expansion of women’s freedom and equality” is required for progress on all the millennium development goals (United Nations, 2006:3,5).

From the above statistics and intentions put in place by the UNDP, the importance of gender equality for development is clear. Seen within the environmental space approach to sustainable development the role and status of women becomes significant as a factor in achieving a more sustainable world.

Establishing gender equality means including work with men and boys (Flood, 2004).

AN EMERGING FIELD: WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT

In 1995, the same year as the UNDP report quoted above, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing and a declaration was adopted by the governments present to encourage work with men and boys (Commission on Status of Women, 1995).

The significance of work with men and boys was discussed at the World Summit on Social Development in 1995. The Programme of Action of this World Summit and its 2000 review also addressed the role of men, in particular with regard to sharing family, household and employment responsibilities with women (Peacock, n.d.:2).

The 2006 UNDP report on gender equality also discusses the need to include work with men and boys as important role-players in achieving gender equality. The approach taken is that the impact of the partners of women, or of men in the environment of women is a significant factor influencing the status and equality of those women in their community. It challenges the notion that the concept 'gender' only refers to work aiming at the empowerment and liberation of women (UNDP, 2006b:4; Flood, 2004).

In this context the shift to include men and boys has contributed to changing the often used phrase Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) (Chant & Guttman, 2000:6 in Flood, 2004).

Lang (2003:8-9 in Flood, 2004) points out the three broad areas in which men's involvement may be enacted in the field of development:

- Working with men as decision makers and service providers
- Integrating men into the development process with a "gendered lens"
- Targeting groups of men and boys when and where they are vulnerable (for example in relation to issues of poverty or sexuality).

Men and boys in the context of sustainable development: a broad scope

In the context of sustainable development it is possible to examine the abovementioned three areas along sociological, economic and ecological perspectives (Table 1).

	Economic aspects	Sociological aspects	Ecological aspects
Men as decision makers		Focus of this essay	
Integrating men into the development process			
Targeting vulnerable groups of men and boys			

Table 1: Potential field of study of men and boys in sustainable development

However, the detailed examination of the ‘grid’ that emerges if one considers the impact and role of men in these nine ‘categories’ lies beyond the scope of this essay. It can be noted that the separation or classification of these qualities or fields may perhaps provide a useful frame of reference for exploration and analysis, but it is much less separate in reality. As mentioned previously, economic aspects are embedded in sociological aspects which are always embedded in ecological considerations (RSA, 2006:19).

In examining the need to establish gender equality it is essential to include work with men and boys. Internationally, a range of declarations and commitments have been launched and published that outline several key commitments and factors, from the Beijing Declaration in 1995 to the recent declaration of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2004 (Peacock, n.d.:3). Including men and boys as a part of the solution (Flood, 2004) will lead to women having more opportunities or “freedoms”, as Sen describes these factors (UNDP, 2006b:3). Moreover, it will support them in moving over the threshold of low quality of life towards a sustainable quality of life, as defined by the environmental space approach. In the context of the environmental space approach this equates to an increased level of consumption, amongst other factors like “freedoms” and increasing opportunities (Sen, 2001).

Consequently, from the wide potential field of examining men and boys in a sustainable development context I shall focus on the social perspective of working with men as decision makers as well as on the integration of men into the development process, using a “gendered lens” (McLaren, 2003; Lang, 2003:8-9 in Flood, 2004).

Men as decision makers at the household level

As mentioned above, several levels of inequality exist. A significant factor that impacts on equality is the nature of the relationship between the different parties.

Most immediately, men (or more accurately, specific groups of men) control the resources required to implement women's claims for justice. But, more broadly, gender inequalities are based in gender relations, in the complex webs of relationships that exist at every level of human experience.

(Connell, 2003:3 in Flood, 2004)

Clearly gender inequality does not only affect women at the policy level. The lack of women representation in policy structures has been well recognized globally by structures such as the UNDP. For example, in MDG 3 there are significant measures being implemented in many countries currently to address this (United Nations, 2006:8).

In order to examine the impact of gender equality on sustainable development, the focus in this essay is on the micro level and in particular on the power dynamics within the household context. This level of gender inequality has been named "household inequality" by Sen (2001). It follows that the role of men and boys can also be seen to have an impact on the experience of women and girls at a household level.

Integrating men into the development process in South Africa

In South Africa the role of men in development is most visible in the light of two epidemics, namely HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. This violence and the unequal power it reflects between men and women is one of the root causes of the rapid spread of HIV in South Africa. Almost one-third of sexually experienced women (31%) reported that they had not wanted their first sexual encounter and that they had been coerced into sex. It follows logically that young women in South Africa are much more likely to be infected than men. Young women constitute 77% of the 10% of South African youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who are infected with HIV/AIDS (Peacock, n.d.:1).

HIV/AIDS has been most prevalent in poverty-stricken contexts and women have been the gender that have been burdened the most by the disease. In South Africa access to healthcare and the opportunity to be part of a healthy relationship are therefore key issues in gender equity (Desmond & Desmond, 2006:226).

CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender and sustainability at a household level

The above literature review has provided the beginning of a practical framework for examining gender and sustainability at a household level. I shall utilize this framework to examine the case study recorded below. The fundamental elements and themes contained

in the framework discussed above can be summarized as follows before they are applied to the case study:

Beginning with the broad considerations of equity in sustainable development, the anthropocentric orientation of the social issues within sustainable development is discussed. The focus is on intra-generational equity.

The aspect of sustainable development that is used as a context for examining equity is consumption levels, as a scale from low quality of life to extremely high levels of consumption. The environmental space approach dictates that sustainability between these two extremes is defined by the lowest possible consumption set by minimum standards and needs of human living and the highest level set by the available resources equitably distributed. The essay focuses on gender inequality that affects women in such a way that they are placed beneath the lowest level of human dignity. It is argued that sustainability and a more sustainable world is reached for these women as they ascend towards more opportunities, greater consumption and a higher quality of life.

Gender inequality in the context of development is explored and some indicators are discussed. The broad field is once again levels of consumption, and as the concern is with gender inequality at a household level, the specific areas of interest are taken from both globally and locally oriented frameworks. These areas and dimensions are selected with two motivating factors, firstly the scope of this paper and secondly the focus of the argument.

From Amartya Sen's work the idea of household inequality, professional inequality and ownership inequality will provide the platform for the discussion of the case study.

Some dimensions are taken from the 1993 Vienna Declaration:

- Equal access to basic social services including education and health
- Equal reward for equal work
- Equal rights of citizens in all areas of life, both public –such as the workplace – and private – such as the home.

An indicator taken from the Gender Development Index is estimated earned income.

As established in the literature review, the important factor is the comparison of men's and women's income levels, rather than just the level of income. Finally, from UN research the question of 'invisible work' is drawn, where the household work in which women are often involved is not regarded as valuable because it has not been quantified in monetary value.

Male partners who participate in educational programming could experience a change in their behaviour towards their female partners as a result of this participation.

The outline of a combination of indicators can be used to assess two concerns: firstly, whether the general equality between partners has improved along the dimensions named

and secondly, whether this has led to a more sustainable development of the household examined.

From the literature reviewed above I draw two conclusions, namely that improved equity effects a more sustainable state of affairs for all involved and that work with men and boys impacts gender equality in a manner that increases this equity.

Consequently I make the case that a more sustainable world is possible through achieving more gender equality, improving the status of women by way of targeted educational work with men. This is the argument that the following case study will test.

PART B: APPLICATION

CASE STUDY

Co-managing a construction business

This case study was captured by means of a one-hour intensive interview with the subjects, supported by several conversations and observations preceding the interview.

Gregory (44) and Sophia (40) (not their real names) are the parents of a family living in a poor suburb in Cape Town. They have two children: one a teenager from Sophia's previous marriage and the other a toddler from their own marriage. Gregory is a Xhosa man and Sophia is a Coloured woman. They had been married for nine years at the time of the writing of this case study.

They changed certain patterns of behaviour that had been prevalent in their household during the first four to five years of their marriage. Consequently, their household is much more sustainable now. During these initial years Sophia was a machinist at a sewing factory and Gregory had a small construction and painting business. At the time they got married Gregory accepted a full-time post as a fieldworker for an NGO, in order to have a secure income. However, their combined income was still not enough to support the household and Gregory continued with his building work after-hours and at weekends.

The programme in which Gregory became involved, as a fieldworker, is an educational programme aimed at men, focused on eradicating harmful stereotypes of masculinity. A tension emerged for Gregory between what he was teaching other men in the day and what he was practising in his own home:

When they speak about the challenges of that time the central theme is the management of money. Gregory acknowledges that Sophia is much more thrifty than he is. At that time, however, he placed himself in the role of sole provider. He uses the phrase, "I'm the man!" to describe his own mindset in that phase. His perception at the time was that he should deal with the income and budgeting of the household and that Sophia "should not be concerned with money". In reality, however, he was the one who was spending more than they had available and they experienced serious shortages in their household.

He describes an example where Sophia had no food to feed their household and was obliged to ask their neighbours and family for some food. The neighbours and family were very willing to help out. Gregory reflects that since he found it impossible to ask others for food, he would only ask for paint-jobs and consequently their community did not get the message from him that they were in trouble.

Whenever Sophia mentioned the topic of money Gregory would react with verbal and emotional violence. At times Sophia felt physically threatened. He would shout at Sophia that he would “take care of it”, but unfortunately he did not manage to “take care of it” at these times.

At the same time Gregory received more and more requests for building or painting work. His after-hours schedule filled up and he would spend all evenings of the week and weekends working. Then he made a decision to change the whole situation.

When the question was put to Gregory in the capturing of this case study: “What influenced the change?” he responded that “We were going nowhere; we were steering towards a disaster.”

Gregory made two important shifts:

Firstly, he handed over the management of their household finances to Sophia. He allowed her to take most of the responsibility in their household budget and financial planning. The process was neither easy nor simple. The most difficult challenge for him was to manage his anger when he did not agree with her, but he did it. From Sophia’s point of view, this was the most important shift. For Gregory, it was where the programme he was involved in provided the most important skills, namely to deal with the change of empowering the woman in his life.

Secondly he began to introduce her to his building clients. He showed her the ropes of running a painting and building business. Sophia managed the business so well, and enjoyed it so much, that she was able to leave her job as a machinist. Gregory spent more time with his family and was much more relaxed and less reactive. His performance in his daytime job also improved. They steadily began to repay their debts. At the time of capturing the case study Gregory had also left his full-time job to work with Sophia and the building business.

At the end of the interview the question was put to the couple: “Is your household sustainable now?” At first they seemed confused, and responded that they still had a lot to do before they could be sustainable. The question was then rephrased as: “Is your household *more* sustainable now? More sustainable than it was before Gregory made the shifts?”

They both beamed and enthusiastically Sophia replied:
“Absolutely!”

INTRODUCTION

The case study describes the household of a couple from Cape Town and the way they support and manage their household financially. The case was chosen on the basis of a variety of factors. Since the husband is a personal acquaintance of the author, that made the case accessible for study. The husband has also been a part of a gender programme (the Men as Partners programme) for three years. They have been through significant shifts in the way they manage their income. This combination of factors provided a good example of the way gender equality and sustainability within a household interplay.

References for the case study

A one-hour interview was formally arranged and a recording device was used with the consent of the participants to record the conversation. Targeted questions were drawn from the literature review and used to structure the conversation. The main body of reference for this part of the essay is the interview informing the abovementioned account. Necessary references from the literature review will be used to support the discussion. The interview was transcribed and in the study a quote is used from the transcription. The couple granted the author permission to use information known to him through his personal acquaintance with them. This will be indicated where necessary.

The general equality existing between the partners in the couple will be examined in the discussion below, followed by an exploration of the sustainability of the household. Finally the conclusions of the whole essay will be reflected.

EXAMINING GENDER EQUALITY AT A HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

Household inequality

The case study contains a few examples of household inequality (cf. Sen, 2001) and instances where the equality has improved. A major example is the lack of control over household finance that Sophia suffered. She had access to a small wage that she was receiving from her work, but this was not sufficient to provide for the household. Gregory was able to support her financially, but he was unwise in his spending and would spend money on items that were not a priority to the household and family. His insistence on managing the household money prevented his family from accessing food and other essentials that they needed. He kept blocking this topic of conversation by losing his temper and displaying aggressive behaviour that forced Sophia to back down.

Equal rights in the household

After Gregory had made the shift, Sophia enjoyed an expansion of her human rights such as her right to manage her own income. The children's right to enjoy a safe and conflict-free environment was also improved after Gregory had learnt how to manage his anger. Gregory observed that the improvement in his wife's quality of life also benefited him. Sophia's fear of Gregory's reactive outbursts also lessened and in this way her right to safety also improved.

Equal reward for equal work

In the household inequality often manifests in the levels of work that women and men participate in to manage the house. Sen uses the term 'invisible work' where the household work in which women are often involved is not regarded as valuable because it has not been quantified in monetary value (cf. Sen, 2001; UNDP, 1995).

Once Gregory had become less reactive about topics such as money and the work in the house, he and his wife took on certain new roles within the household. In the interview Gregory mentioned that Sophia still washes more dishes than he does, for example, but that when she is ill he will assist her and take over some of her tasks. He would fulfil other tasks in the house, such as maintenance and repairs. They mentioned that it is a process that is still continuing. It was not a clearly negotiated process of sitting down and planning who does what, but each partner adopted specific new roles almost automatically. Overall, however, since Sophia is working with Gregory in the workplace, he has begun to do more work around the house.

Professional inequality

Sophia mentioned that she enjoys the construction business much more than her old job as a machinist in a sewing factory. She has access to the same work that her husband has. This newly established level of professional equality is obviously easy to adjust and control on such a micro-level. Now she has more control over the business in which she is involved and she finds it more satisfying. Previously Gregory had the reins of the business in his hands. Now Sophia enjoys the right to improve her own financial situation as much as Gregory does. She has the capacity to control her own professional situation (cf. Sen, 2001).

Gregory and Sophia have both taken the step out of secure, full-time employment towards managing the construction business. Both of them acknowledge the risk they took that they might earn less in the highly fluctuating world of construction work, but they both feel more satisfied and empowered to create a better future for their family in the long term.

Ownership inequality

When the responsibility of the business shifted to Sophia, the business was officially registered in her name. The shares of the business were also re-allocated. Previously Gregory was the sole proprietor of the business. The new relationship was determined as Sophia owning 70% and Gregory owning 30% of the business. This is the only division of the benefits of the business. The income is distributed together and equally. Although Sophia holds the most shares in the business they feel it is a fair distribution since Gregory has the most expertise in the field. The allocation guarantees Gregory's commitment to the business.

The social perspective of working with men as decision makers

Power dynamics in relationships between women and men are vital in establishing equality (Flood, 2004). The power dynamic within the household captured in the case study had gone through a fundamental shift: Gregory had previously been completely in control of the resources that entered the house. He had enforced this control by reacting to Sophia in an intimidatory manner. In the interview Sophia mentions that the most important shift for her, in the whole transformation of their household, was that Gregory was less reactive when discussing money. She had previously lived in fear of discussing the topic with him.

His decisions controlled what was happening in the budget. It was however clear to him and to Sophia that these decisions were not good decisions. Their house would often be without food and his debtors would constantly be on their doorstep asking for their due.

The shift he had made was to include Sophia in the financial decision-making process in the household. He observed that he was heading for a disaster and decided to have a collaborative decision-making approach with his wife in the allocation of their resources.

This turned out to be a good decision that benefited the household by improving the sustainability of their income.

The integration of men into the development process

Gregory was now using a new frame of reference in working together with Sophia in such a way in the business. The process of his moving into this new way of acting had two main causes: Firstly, he had realized that it was not sustainable for him to continue controlling the household finances in the way he had previously; he needed to do something different if he wanted the household to survive, and he sincerely wanted the household to survive. Secondly, he had realized that he was acting according to a stereotype set by men around him, predominantly his father. This stereotype was presented to him as 'the way a man should act'. A major factor in stepping outside this stereotype was Gregory's involvement in the Men as Partners (MAP) programme.

The Men as Partners programme

Gregory had been employed as a fieldworker and a facilitator in the Men as Partners programme for three years. This contributed to his identifying the stereotype that was ruling his household, as well as ways to move beyond it.

It also provided him with skills in anger management to cope with the consequent change in his life. The Men as Partners programme is a comprehensive programme that aims to reduce gender-based violence and HIV infection rates by involving men as a part of this solution. It works across a spectrum of levels from influencing policy all the way to individual education and community education. In South Africa it has been developed and implemented by a wide variety of NGOs (Peacock, n.d.)

Gregory commented in the interview that he felt a tension between what he was practising in his own household and what he was promoting in his work. He began to think differently from what he had done before joining MAP, and began to consider letting some of the responsibility of the business pass to his wife. In other words, he let go of some of the control he was holding on to regarding the household finances.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Estimated earned income

In the literature review it is indicated that McLaren (2003) mentions that, regarding gender equality in terms of income, the level of income is less important than the comparison between levels of income. Initially Gregory had earned more than Sophia as he was maintaining two channels of income. Now they regard the collective income from the business as a single stream of income to be divided collectively as an equal distribution according to the needs of the household. There is no stream of income going to either which the other does not know or approve of.

They are now enjoying equal reward for equal work, managed by both of them. This open method of managing the income ensures that there are no unexpected expenses and that they are both prepared for any costs for which they have to pay. It is a much more sustainable way of managing the household compared to the old way of Gregory trying to deal with debt while he was not able to do so.

Consumption levels and quality of life

In terms of the environmental space approach to sustainability, the literature review has highlighted the lower threshold of the sustainable living space. The minimum level of human need and dignity determines this threshold. I discussed the movement of women towards a higher level of consumption and a higher quality of life based on the literature (Mies & Shiva, 1993; McLaren, 2003).

The example of asking bread from the neighbours

The case study provided a clear example of the abovementioned movement. Anecdotally, Sophia commented on an example that indicated that her life had improved through greater equality with Gregory. At one point there was literally no bread in the house and no money to buy bread. Sophia approached her neighbours and asked them to donate some of their food, which they did. At this point Gregory was not willing to face the level of need in his own house. When Sophia told him where the bread had come from he responded with verbal abuse and stormed out of the house. This situation was clearly not a sustainable way to manage the household.

When Gregory had increased the equality between them, Sophia and her children had an improved quality of life. She was then able to make more decisions about the management of the resources in their home and maintain a more sustainable level of consumption with the household resources. Gregory had previously spent the money in

ways that were not sustainable. Because of the better management of the money their overall household consumption increased. The income level also increased, but the main influence on the consumption level was the management of spending. Since Sophia has become a part of the business, and since she has taken responsibility for managing the household finances, there has never been a shortage of food.

It should be noted that Gregory did not abdicate all responsibility and become a passenger in the household. Sophia is unable to make decisions about the monthly budget without his input. He comments that he advises her in the running of the business and that he is learning a great deal from her about financial management. His roles, both in the household and in the business, are different from hers, but both of them contribute equally of their time and effort.

CONCLUSION

The results found in the case study match the literature discussed above in terms of the view that equality leads to a more sustainable world. Equality is an essential component in working towards sustainability. In this case study the chief resource that was discussed was household income. The case study explored an example where income and a client base were the resources that needed to be maintained in order to ensure the sustainability of a household and a business. It is important to note that household income is itself a result of a wider set of resources and production pathways, ultimately based on the use of ecological resources.

In choosing this focus for the case study the field of maintaining ecological resources and the field of economic policy were omitted. The focus I chose was a social one, with the focus on equality. Based on the discussion in the literature review I would, however, argue that equality is also a significant aspect in attaining this wider set of resources. I believe the example used can be valuable as a starting point for the investigation of the dimensions and levels that support and surround a household, predominantly ecological and economic concerns.

Programmes aimed at including men

In terms of improving the status of women by way of targeted educational work with men, MAP contributed to the change in the household, but it was not the only factor that led to change. It was an essential element of change and if Gregory had not participated he would not have made the change in the way he did. On its own it would not have led to the comprehensive shift that took place.

Equality is not only the responsibility of men

From the case study the perception might arise that Gregory's behaviour was the only limiting factor in the sustainability of the household. A dangerous conclusion that could also be made was that all the power to achieve equality in the household lay with Gregory

– in other words that Sophia could only be empowered should Gregory choose it. This would then be a case of his actually remaining in control and only creating the illusion that she has been empowered. It is important to note that this is not the case.

The specific factor in which I was interested was the role men play in achieving equality. The focus of the literature review had provided a platform from which to investigate the important changes that led to equality and sustainability, and this is why a greater focus was placed on the changes Gregory made.

Sophia also had to make some shifts in her behaviour. These shifts have received less attention in the case study, but they were also challenging. For instance, she had to take on the responsibility of managing the income, and risking the step to a less secure income by depending on the construction business for all her income. Gregory had stepped out of the role of sole provider and she had stepped into more responsibility than she had previously had.

A more sustainable world is possible by achieving greater gender equality

The world of private relationships between two people is often unseen and not recognized by policy, public structures or forums. It is quite easy to discuss issues that conceptually make a lot of sense, but in the implementation of the idea of equality many challenges arise. In contexts where there is much poverty, in particular, sustainability becomes a goal and a motivating factor, for the simple reason of basic survival: “If we do not sustain we will die.” (Direct quotation from case study interview.)

In the context explored in the case study the male partner of the family had recognized the fact that inequality was not sustainable and consequently when a more equal situation had been created, sustainability was a result.

I therefore close with the conclusion that a more sustainable world is indeed possible, from the anthropocentric perspective of providing for current needs from current resources without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Equality can also be achieved with a wide set of factors that need to be kept in consideration, but in this essay the specific focus of equality is gender equality.

Gender equality can be improved through targeted work with men as an important aspect in a wider set of factors. Therefore, work with men can contribute to a more sustainable world by increasing gender equality.

REFERENCES

Achterberg, W. 1994. Can liberal democracy survive the environmental crisis? Sustainability, liberal neutrality and overlapping consensus. In Zweers, W. & Boersema, J. J. (Eds): *Ecology, technology and culture. Essays in environmental philosophy*. Cambridge: The White Horse Press.

Collins Cobuild Dictionary. 2001. Third edition. Glasgow: HarperCollins.

Commission on Status of Women. 1995. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women* at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing> [Retrieved 28 March 2007]

Desmond, C. & Desmond, C. 2006. HIV/AIDS and the crisis of care for children. In Richter, M. & Morrell, R. (Eds). *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC.

Flood, M. 2004. Men, Gender, and Development. *Development Bulletin*,** No. 64, March, pp. 26-30. In *XY Online* at <http://www.xyonline.net/articles.shtml> [Retrieved 27 March 2007]

Gallopín, G. 2003. *A Systems Approach to Sustainability and Sustainable Development*. ECLAC/Government of the Netherlands, Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America.

Hattingh, J. 2001. Conceptualising Ecological Sustainability and Ecologically Sustainable Development in Ethical Terms: Issues and Challenges. *Annale*, 2.

McLaren, D. 2003. Environmental Space, Equity and the Ecological Debt. In Agyeman, J., Bullard, R.D. & Evans, B.(Eds). *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*. London: Earthscan.

Mies, M. & Shiva, V. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London/New Jersey: Zed.

Oswald, A. 1996. GDP can't make you happy. *New Economy*, Vol. 3 (1), pp15-19.

Peacock, D. (n.d.) Article to be published. Provisional title: Sonke Gender Justice and the One Man Can Campaign. Accepted for Commonwealth publication

Pettifor, A., Rees, H. & Stevens, A. 2004. HIV and Sexual Behaviour Among Young South Africans: A National Survey of 15 to 24-year-olds. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

Pezzoli, K. 1997. Sustainable Development: A Transdisciplinary Overview of the Literature. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 40(5), 549-574.

RSA. See: Republic of South Africa.

Republic of South Africa: Department of Environment and Tourism. 2006. Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development in SA. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Seabrook, J. 1994. Consumerism and Happiness. *Ethical Consumer*, 27 January, pp12-23.

Sen, A. 2001. Many faces of gender inequality. *Frontline*. In *The Hindu* at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/flinefl1822>
[Retrieved 12 March 2007]

Sneddon, C., Howarth, R.B. & Norgaard, R.B. 2006. Sustainable Development in a post-Brundtland World. *Ecological Economics*, 57, 253-268.

UNDP. See United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Development Programme. 1995. Human Development Report 1995 in *United Nations Development Programme* at <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1995/en/>
[Retrieved March 18, 2007]

United Nations Development Programme. 2006a. Human Development Report 2006 in *United Nations Development Programme* at <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/report.cfm>
[Retrieved March 26, 2007]

United Nations Development Programme. 2006b. Taking Gender Equality Seriously, Making Progress, Meeting new challenges. *United Nations Development Programme* at <http://www.undp.org/gender/>
[Retrieved March 26, 2007]

United Nations. 2006. *The Millenium Development Goals Report*. New York: United Nations.

Veenhoven, R. 1987. National wealth and individual happiness in Grunert, K and Olander, F. (Eds). *Understanding Economic Behaviour*. London: Kluwer Academic.

WCED. See World Commission on Environment and Development.

Wilkinson, R. 1996. *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*, London: Routledge.

World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. *Our Common Future*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.