Key Messages

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to effective and just environmental and economic decision-making processes and better land and resource governance. Gender-responsive approaches need to identify and lead to actions that stop all forms of violence against women, including women environmental and human rights defenders, and address systemic barriers that stand in the way of women’s enjoyment of human rights. The socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected progress on gender equality, including intensifying the level of violence against women and girls in public and domestic spheres. To achieve sustainable development and an equitable, nature-positive and carbon neutral (net-zero) world, we must urgently get back on track to achieving gender equality, by responding to the setbacks on progress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing entrenched inequalities for women.

At HLPF 2022, WWF calls upon member states and institutions to recognise and respond to the following elements, for the full and effective implementation of SDG 5 and related targets:

- **Take steps to remove systemic socio-economic and cultural barriers and further strengthen and support women's full, equal and informed participation in policy- and decision-making.** While participation is a fundamental right in itself, there is also evidence that diversity in decision-making leads to stronger outcomes overall. Women’s full, equal and informed participation is crucial for COVID-19 recovery and economic transition, but also contributes to better land and resource use governance (related targets 4.2, 4.7, 10.2, 16.7, 16.10).

- **Develop, strengthen and enforce policies and measures to ban all forms of violence against women and gender-based violence in defense of land, natural resources and human rights, and secure access to justice.** High levels of violence have persisted and intensified during the pandemic, including against women environmental and human rights defenders whose voices are often silenced (related targets 4.7, 8.7, 16.1, 16.3).

- **Advance policies and measures that recognize women's equal access and ensure land and women's resource ownership and rights** (related targets 1.4, 1.5, 2.3).

- **Promote just and gender-transformative measures, and awareness raising, to keep women in the labor force.** Tenure security and safe, adequate, fairly and equitably paid jobs for women, especially rural and Indigenous women, can enable women to have more substantive engagement in the economy and decision-making processes, and can strengthen their capacity and incentive to invest in sustainable practices and/or continue to practice sustainability (related targets 1.2, 1.b, 2.3, 8.3, 8.5).

- **Ensure gender-responsive budget allocation and resources to enhance gender equality** in all sectors and aspects of public life (related target 1.a, 10.2, 10.3, 16.7, 16.b).
Background

Gender-based violence and environmental human rights defenders
Related targets: 4.7, 8.7, 16.1, 16.3

The socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected progress on gender equality, including intensifying the level of violence against women and girls in public and domestic spheres. The pandemic has aggravated the health risks and violence against men and women who defend water, land, forests and the rights of indigenous and farming communities. Powerful economic interests, the expansion of large scale mining activities and agribusiness have increased extraction of natural resources in many places taking advantage of limited communication, services and weak reporting mechanisms.

Full, effective and equal participation in decision-making
Related targets: 4.2, 4.7, 10.2, 16.7, 16.10

Women are still underrepresented in decision-making processes and critical leadership positions, including in environmental policies, land use planning and budgeting at all levels. Effective and inclusive decision-making and action on land and resource governance requires all members of society to be fully engaged. This includes women and girls whose contributions, rights, knowledge and practices are often undervalued and not appropriately reflected through equal participation in policy and decision making related to sustainable land-use governance, agriculture and other productive sectors. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to effective environmental decision-making processes and lead to better resource governance, land and resource use outcomes.

Equal access to economic resource and land ownership
Related targets: 1.2, 1.b, 2.3, 8.3, 8.5, 1.4, 1.5, 2.3

Women — especially rural and indigenous women who are farmers, fishers, small traders and food providers for their families — often bear the greater and direct brunt of the consequences when natural resources are destroyed or depleted. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has also affected women more, thus furthering inequality. While women’s economic and other contributions are crucial, they are often limited to roles at the margins and in the informal sector, and women have minimal voice when it comes to decision-making for resource management. For example, the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (WEF) identified economic participation and opportunity as the second largest gaps. Innovation is also needed to ensure women’s economic empowerment at scale, leading in the transition to a more sustainable economic model, while taking into account historical and underlying gender discrimination and seeking to create sustainable economic opportunities. Women’s extreme poverty is linked to multiple factors which include insecure land rights, lack of access to finance and technology, poor market conditions, and other social practices. However, at local level, women have created, developed, built initiatives and practiced solutions. Their local initiatives matter. Data for 2020 from 36 countries show that substantial improvement has been achieved in establishing equal inheritance rights for example (69%), while progress is lagging in areas including land registration, customary law, and women’s representation in land governance. Equitable access to land and natural resources remains important for women’s economic empowerment.
Gender equality and women's rights

Related targets: 4.2, 4.7, 10.2, 16.7, 16.10

Women’s rights are human rights. These rights include the right to live free from violence and discrimination, to be educated, to own property, to vote and to earn a fair and equal wage. Efforts to improve the economy, land and resource use governance need to ensure the protection, empowerment, leadership, decision making and meaningful and informed participation of women and girls. Discriminatory laws and legal gaps continue to prevent women from fully enjoying their human rights. This refers to both presence (gender quota) in national parliament; budgetary commitments to implement legislation addressing violence against women, and equal pay, among other things. Gender-responsive approaches need to identify and lead to actions that address gaps and systemic barriers that stand in the way of women’s enjoyment of human rights, including in relation to restoration and natural resource and land use.

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