

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**
[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 9 | Issue 5

2026

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The Intersection of Gender Justice and Sustainable Development in the Global Context: An Analytical Study with Specific Reference to the Concept of Marriage in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intersection of gender justice and sustainable development in the global context, with specific reference to the concept of marriage in India. Gender inequality has been a crucial social issue all over the world for centuries. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. SDG 5 aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, ensuring their equal access to education, healthcare, economic resources and political participation. Gender equality is a crucial aspect of the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and achieving it is therefore vital for sustainable development. It entails a commitment to address the gendered impacts of environmental degradation and to support equitable resource management and the economic empowerment of women, for the benefit of whole communities. Ultimately, integrating gender equity into environmental initiatives produces results that benefit people and the planet, contributing to a more just and sustainable world overall. In India, discriminatory attitudes distinguishing between men and women have existed for generations. The deep-rooted patriarchal family system and customary practices are the major contributors to gender discrimination in India. The institution of marriage, as shaped by patriarchal custom, can operate to deny women the full enjoyment of basic human rights, and girls in many families continue to face discrimination in education, healthcare and equal treatment with boys. Marriage is no doubt essential to family life, but it should not come at the cost of the lives of women, nor should it be a barrier to women's development. The empowerment of women should begin within the family, enabling them to achieve their full potential and to participate fully in society. The study is primarily theoretical and employs a qualitative methodology. Its objective is to explore the relationship between gender justice and sustainable development by analysing their attributes, viewpoints and interpretations. By

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integrating the idea of gender justice with that of sustainable development, it seeks to consolidate information that is often scattered or semi-structured. Data are gathered through desk research, descriptive analysis and theoretical observation. The paper underscores the significance of achieving gender justice in the pursuit of sustainable development. It further investigates the correlation between the advancement of sustainable development and the notion of gender justice. Gender justice is not merely a moral imperative but also a catalyst for effective and sustainable development. Gender justice and sustainable development are intrinsically linked; achieving one is crucial to the success of the other. Prioritising women's rights as human rights calls for collective action, as stewards of the planet, towards a more sustainable, just and equitable world. The paper seeks to enhance existing understanding and stresses the importance of gender justice for achieving effective and sustainable development.

Keywords: Gender Justice, Global, Intersection, Marriage, Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of gender justice and sustainable development is a mutually reinforcing relationship, not merely a parallel one. Gender equality is both a fundamental human right and a crucial prerequisite for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality is expressly the subject of Goal 5, but it is impliedly connected with all the SDGs.¹ Without gender justice, sustainable progress in ending poverty, ensuring food security, addressing climate change and building peaceful societies will be impossible. Globally, women constitute nearly half of the world's population, yet they continue to experience disproportionate disadvantages in access to education, healthcare, employment, property and political participation.² Structural gender inequalities impede progress in poverty eradication, food security, climate action and peace-building.³ In this context, gender justice is not merely an ethical aspiration but a functional necessity for sustainable development.

¹ G.A. Res. 70/1, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, ¶ 20 (Sept. 25, 2015) ("Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets.").

² WORLD BANK, *Population, Female (% of Total Population)*, World Development Indicators, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS> (49.7 per cent of the world's population in 2024) (last visited Oct. 4, 2026); UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE GENDER SNAPSHOT 2024 2, 6, 13 (2024), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024-en.pdf>.

³ WORLD BANK, WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW 2023, at 11–12 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1944-5> (gender equality "is essential to end extreme poverty"); see also G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, ¶ 20; UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 4 (gender gaps in food systems result in women's disproportionate food insecurity; closing them would reduce the number of food-insecure people by 45 million), 7 (existing inequalities make women particularly vulnerable to climate change and limit their contribution to mitigation and adaptation), 21 (including women in conflict resolution leads to better outcomes, yet women averaged only 9.6 per cent of negotiators).

In India, gender inequality is deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures, customary practices and the personal laws governing marriage and family relations. Marriage, though socially revered as a sacrosanct institution, often becomes a mechanism through which women's autonomy and rights are curtailed.⁴ This paper critically examines how the concept of marriage in India intersects with gender justice and sustainable development, and how reforming marital norms is essential for realising constitutional values and global development commitments.

II. GENDER JUSTICE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A. Gender inequality as a barrier

Gender inequality creates systemic barriers that hinder progress across all dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Advancing gender justice, conversely, serves as a powerful catalyst for achieving the SDGs. Achieving gender equality, the object of SDG 5, is essential for reaching all 17 SDGs because it is a fundamental cross-cutting issue. Progress on gender equality accelerates progress on the other goals, while gender inequality hinders it.⁵

B. SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

SDG 5 is dedicated to addressing the systemic causes of discrimination and gender disparity. Its targets include ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls; eliminating all forms of violence against them in the public and private spheres; eliminating harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work; ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in decision-making; ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; giving women equal rights to economic resources; enhancing the use of enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women; and adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality.⁶

C. Interlinkages with other Sustainable Development Goals

Gender equality is interconnected with all the other Sustainable Development Goals, and the progress of the entire 2030 Agenda relies on it.

⁴ FLAVIA AGNES, LAW AND GENDER INEQUALITY: THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INDIA (1999); *see also Joseph Shine v. Union of India*, (2019) 3 SCC 39, [2018] 11 S.C.R. 765, 916–17 (Chandrachud, J., concurring) (marriage is “a significant social institution where this subordination is pronounced”).

⁵ G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, ¶ 20; UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 4.

⁶ G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, targets 5.1–5.6, 5.a–5.c.

i. People-focused goals (SDGs 1–4)

- Gender equality is crucial for SDG 1 (No Poverty), as poverty disproportionately affects women and girls.⁷
- For SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), empowering women in agriculture improves food security.⁸
- For SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), access to reproductive health is itself an SDG 5 target, and gender discrimination limits access to healthcare.⁹
- Equal access to education for girls under SDG 4 (Quality Education) helps break the cycle of poverty and boosts economic growth.¹⁰

ii. Prosperity-focused goals (SDGs 6–12)

- Involving women in managing water resources is key to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).¹¹
- Increased access to clean energy for women improves health and reduces unpaid labour, advancing SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).¹²
- Closing the gender pay gap contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).¹³
- Promoting women in science and technology and ensuring gender-responsive infrastructure are vital for SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).¹⁴
- Achieving gender equality is a prerequisite for reducing broader inequalities under SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).¹⁵
- Including women in urban planning under SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) helps create safe and resilient cities.¹⁶

⁷ UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 8 (in 2024 the extreme poverty rate was 9.8 per cent for women and girls against 9.1 per cent for men and boys, and 24.3 million more females than males lived in extreme poverty).

⁸ *Id.* at 4; *see also* G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, target 2.3 (doubling the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, “in particular women”).

⁹ G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, targets 3.7, 5.6; UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 13 (only 56 per cent of married or in-union women aged 15–49 can make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights).

¹⁰ *See* UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 6, 11.

¹¹ *Id.* at 14.

¹² *Id.* at 5.

¹³ *Id.* at 6 (a global gender pay gap of 20 per cent); G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, target 8.5 (“equal pay for work of equal value”).

¹⁴ UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 17.

¹⁵ *See* G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, target 10.2 (inclusion of all “irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status”).

¹⁶ *Id.* targets 11.2, 11.7; UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 19.

- Ensuring women's representation in environmental decision-making supports the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns under SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).¹⁷

iii. Planet-focused goals (SDGs 13–15)

- Integrating women's knowledge into climate strategies is vital for SDG 13 (Climate Action), as women are disproportionately affected by climate change.¹⁸
- Women's inclusion in decision-making is also necessary for protecting biodiversity and resources under SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).¹⁹

iv. Peace- and partnership-focused goals (SDGs 16–17)

- Ensuring women's participation in peace negotiations and institutions is critical for SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).²⁰
- Since gender equality is fundamental to all the goals, it must be integrated into all partnerships under SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Gender equality is thus integral to the achievement of all the SDGs. Poverty eradication (SDG 1) is unattainable without women's access to livelihoods and property rights. Food security (SDG 2) depends heavily on empowering women farmers. Health and well-being (SDG 3) require the elimination of gender-based violence and reproductive injustice. Education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13) and peaceful institutions (SDG 16) are similarly contingent upon women's equal participation and agency.

III. MARRIAGE AS A SITE OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA

A. Marriage under Hindu law

Marriage is a sacred institution for Hindus, and it is the very foundation of a stable family and a civilised society. There are, however, certain prerequisites and conditions for a valid marriage. All personal laws lay down conditions that must be complied with to enter into or solemnise a legal marriage. Under Hindu law, the concept of marriage has undergone various changes since codification. Before codification, child marriage was widely prevalent: on the figures of the 1921 census, the Age of Consent Committee calculated that 39.8 per cent of all girls in India aged between ten and fifteen were married or widowed.²¹ Under the uncoded law, the

¹⁷ See UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 7.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 3, 7, 20; see also G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, target 13.b (climate planning capacity "focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities").

¹⁹ UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 7.

²⁰ *Id.* at 21; S.C. Res. 1325, ¶ 1 (Oct. 31, 2000).

²¹ GOV'T OF INDIA, REPORT OF THE AGE OF CONSENT COMMITTEE, 1928–1929 ¶¶ 219–20 (1929).

Mitakshara joint family was organised on patriarchal lines, and women's position in matters of property and family governance was markedly unequal. The management of the joint family vested in the *karta*, its head, who was ordinarily the senior-most male member; because only a coparcener could be *karta*, no female member could act as *karta*, and women were excluded from the management of the joint family.²²

No female was a member of the Mitakshara coparcenary: a woman had a right to sustenance from the joint family but no birth right in its property, and her rights of inheritance extended only to property separately owned by an individual.²³ With the codification of Hindu law, however, radical changes were effected in personal matters such as marriage, property rights, adoption, guardianship and maintenance.²⁴ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 was a landmark piece of social legislation.²⁵ The Act contains elaborate provisions on the conditions for a valid marriage, matrimonial reliefs, jurisdiction and procedure, maintenance and the custody of children.

B. Marriage under Muslim law

Marriage, or *nikah*, is defined in Muslim law as “a contract which has for its object the procreation and the legalizing of children”.²⁶ A Muslim marriage is thus a contract whose objects are (a) procreation and (b) the legalising of children. Neither writing nor any religious ceremony is essential to its validity, although under Sunni law the proposal and its acceptance must be made at one meeting in the presence of witnesses (Shia law does not require witnesses).²⁷ Since marriage in Islam is a contract, the usual conditions necessary to constitute a valid contract must be fulfilled.

The essential requirements for a valid Muslim marriage are capacity to contract the marriage, proposal and acceptance, and the absence of any impediment to the marriage.²⁸ Particular rules of Muslim personal law on marriage and its dissolution have been challenged as discriminatory

²² *Sujata Sharma v. Manu Gupta*, 226 (2016) DLT 647, ¶¶ 6, 27 (Del. HC 2015) (managership of the joint family “is regulated by seniority”, and what prevented a female member from becoming *karta* was “that she did not possess the necessary qualification of co-parcenership”); LAW COMM’N OF INDIA, REPORT NO. 174: PROPERTY RIGHTS OF WOMEN: PROPOSED REFORMS UNDER THE HINDU LAW ¶ 2.14 (2000) (powers vested “in the *karta* or male head of the family”). That disqualification has since been removed: the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 made a daughter a coparcener in the same manner as a son, *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, (2020) 9 SCC 1, ¶ 129(i), and the eldest female coparcener may now be *karta*, *Sujata Sharma*, 226 (2016) DLT 647, ¶ 27.

²³ LAW COMM’N OF INDIA, *supra* note 22, ¶¶ 1.3.1–1.3.3.

²⁴ The Hindu Succession Act, No. 30 of 1956, INDIA CODE (1956); The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, No. 32 of 1956, INDIA CODE (1956); The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, No. 78 of 1956, INDIA CODE (1956); *see also infra* note 25 (the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955).

²⁵ The Hindu Marriage Act, No. 25 of 1955, INDIA CODE (1955). The Act came into force on 18 May 1955.

²⁶ D.F. MULLA, PRINCIPLES OF MAHOMEDAN LAW § 194 (Sir Sajba Rangnekar ed., 12th ed. 1944).

²⁷ *Id.* § 196.

²⁸ *Id.* §§ 195–196, 198A–204.

against women: in *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* the petitioners contended that instantaneous triple *talaq* offended the guarantees of equality and non-discrimination in Articles 14 and 15, and the Supreme Court, by a majority of three to two, set aside the practice of *talaq-e-biddat*.²⁹

C. Marriage under Christian law

Under the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872, the conditions for the certification of a marriage of Indian Christians are laid down in Section 60 of the Act.³⁰

Across communities, marriage in India has too often operated as a cage for women rather than as a partnership of equals. A concurring opinion in the Supreme Court has described marriage as a social institution in which women's subordination is pronounced, "with entrenched structures of patriarchy and romantic paternalism shackling women into a less than equal existence".³¹ Within marriage, women are commonly expected to bear the principal responsibility for caring for all the members of the family: the national Time Use Survey of 2019 found that about 80 per cent of women, against about 20 per cent of men, performed unpaid domestic services for household members, the women spending about five hours a day on them and the men about an hour and a half.³² Many Indian women are brought up to abide by age-old customary practices relating to marriage, and for many of them the result has been lost opportunities in education, economic independence, health and well-being, and political, economic and public life.³³ Marriage should not be a burden for a woman; equal rights and responsibilities should vest in both men and women. The right to equality is enshrined as a fundamental right in the Constitution of India, and Article 15(1) provides that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.³⁴

²⁹ *Shayara Bano v. Union of India*, (2017) 9 SCC 1 (order of the Court).

³⁰ The Indian Christian Marriage Act, No. 15 of 1872, INDIA CODE (1872), § 60. The conditions are that (1) the age of the man intending to be married shall not be under twenty-one years, and the age of the woman intending to be married shall not be under eighteen years; (2) neither of the persons intending to be married shall have a wife or husband still living; and (3) in the presence of a person licensed under Section 9, and of at least two credible witnesses other than such person, each of the parties shall say to the other "I call upon these persons here present to witness that, I, A.B., in the presence of Almighty God, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, do take thee, C.D., to be my lawful wedded wife or husband" or words to the like effect.

³¹ *Joseph Shine*, [2018] 11 S.C.R. at 916–17 (Chandrachud, J., concurring).

³² MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEV., *Gender Parity in Household Work*, PRESS INFO. BUREAU (Dec. 17, 2021), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1782637> (reporting the Time Use Survey, January–December 2019, of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation).

³³ See UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 8 (unpaid care and domestic work reduces women's paid working hours, income, savings and pensions), 11 (social norms, unpaid care and domestic work and early marriage limit girls' chances of reaching and staying in school, including in Central and Southern Asia).

³⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 15, cl. 1.

D. Marriage, patriarchy and the denial of women's rights

Across religious communities, marriage in India has frequently placed women's labour and sexuality under the control of the husband and the marital family; until the Supreme Court struck it down, the law of adultery treated a married woman as the sexual property of her husband, and a concurring opinion rejected the "patriarchal conception of marriage" on which that law rested.³⁵ Women disproportionately bear unpaid care work, often at the cost of education, employment, health and public participation.³⁶ Such systemic inequalities contradict the constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity and non-discrimination.

IV. CONSTITUTIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR GENDER JUSTICE

A. Constitutional mandate in India

The Constitution of India enshrines gender equality through Articles 14, 15 and 21. In *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* the Supreme Court struck down the offence of adultery as violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21; one of the concurring opinions identified the family, and marriage in particular, as the sphere in which women's subordination had historically been considered beyond remedy, and affirmed the duty of the State to protect the fundamental rights of women in unequal societal structures.³⁷ The prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex and the guarantee of dignity and personal liberty thus impose affirmative obligations on the State to dismantle patriarchal structures, including those embedded within the family and marriage.

B. Global regulatory mechanisms for gender justice

Global mechanisms for gender justice include a range of legally binding treaties, non-binding agreements and institutional bodies at the global and regional levels. These frameworks aim to end discrimination and violence against women and girls, promote equal opportunities and ensure accountability for gender-based crimes.

i. United Nations mechanisms

The United Nations has established the most prominent international framework for advancing gender justice.

³⁵ *Joseph Shine*, [2018] 11 S.C.R. at 917 (Chandrachud, J., concurring).

³⁶ MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEV., *supra* note 32; UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 8, 11, 13 (globally, women spend 2.5 times as many hours a day as men on unpaid care and domestic work).

³⁷ *Joseph Shine*, [2018] 11 S.C.R. at 950 (Malhotra, J., concurring); *id.* at 915–17 (Chandrachud, J., concurring).

ii. Treaties and declarations

Several key international instruments address gender justice:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination against women and requires States parties to take action to end it. Its Optional Protocol allows individuals to submit complaints.³⁸
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms that everyone is entitled to human rights without distinction of any kind, including sex.³⁹
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) provides a comprehensive definition of violence against women and emphasises the responsibility of States to address it.⁴⁰
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a significant document that affirms that women's rights are human rights.⁴¹
- Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) specifically aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.⁴²
- Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) addresses the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and calls for their inclusion in peace processes.⁴³

iii. United Nations agencies and bodies

Key UN entities working on gender justice include:

- UN Women, dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.⁴⁴
- The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which documents women's lives and sets international standards.⁴⁵

³⁸ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women arts. 1, 2, 16, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13; Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women art. 2, Oct. 6, 1999, 2131 U.N.T.S. 83. India signed the Convention on 30 July 1980 and ratified it on 9 July 1993, with declarations on articles 5(a), 16(1) and 16(2); it is not a party to the Optional Protocol. UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION, *Status of Treaties*, ch. IV, nos. 8, 8.b, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8-b&chapter=4 (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

³⁹ G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 2 (Dec. 10, 1948).

⁴⁰ G.A. Res. 48/104, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women arts. 1, 4 (Dec. 20, 1993).

⁴¹ Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration*, ¶ 14, in Rep. of the Fourth World Conference on Women, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, ch. I, res. 1, annex I (1996).

⁴² G.A. Res. 70/1, *supra* note 1, Goal 5.

⁴³ S.C. Res. 1325, pmb., ¶ 1 (Oct. 31, 2000).

⁴⁴ UN WOMEN, *About UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026) (created by the General Assembly in July 2010 as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women).

⁴⁵ UN WOMEN, *Commission on the Status of Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which promotes legal reform and works to eliminate gender-based violence.⁴⁶
- The Gender Justice Platform, a joint initiative of UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which provides legal and policy support.⁴⁷

iv. International criminal justice

International criminal justice mechanisms address gender-based crimes:

- The International Criminal Court (ICC), established by the Rome Statute, recognises sexual and gender-based violence as serious international crimes and prioritises their investigation and prosecution.⁴⁸
- The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was notable for prosecuting wartime sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴⁹

v. Regional mechanisms

Regional bodies complement global efforts with instruments tailored to local contexts.

- **Africa:** The Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees comprehensive rights for women in Africa.⁵⁰
- **The Americas:** The Convention of Belém do Pará, adopted in 1994, proclaims that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights, recognises every woman's right to be free from violence in both the public and the private spheres, and was the first instrument to establish mechanisms for the protection of women's rights against such violence.⁵¹

⁴⁶ OFF. OF THE U.N. HIGH COMM'R FOR HUM. RTS., *OHCHR and Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

⁴⁷ UN WOMEN, *Access to Justice for Women and Girls: UNDP and UN Women Launched the Gender Justice Platform* (Mar. 8, 2022), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2022/03/access-to-justice-for-women-and-girls-undp-and-un-women-launched-the-gender-justice-platform>.

⁴⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court arts. 7(1)(g), 8(2)(b)(xxii), 8(2)(e)(vi), 54(1)(b), July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90; OFF. OF THE PROSECUTOR, INT'L CRIM. CT., *POLICY ON GENDER-BASED CRIMES 1* (2023) (such crimes "are thus a strategic priority for the Office").

⁴⁹ U.N. INT'L CRIM. TRIBUNAL FOR THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA, *Crimes of Sexual Violence*, <https://www.icty.org/en/features/crimes-sexual-violence> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

⁵⁰ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa arts. II–XXIV, July 11, 2003 (art. VI requiring that women and men "enjoy equal rights and are regarded as equal partners in marriage").

⁵¹ Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women art. 3, June 9, 1994, <https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html>; ORG. OF AM. STATES, *About MESECVI*, <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/about.asp> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

- **Europe:** The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe aims to protect women against all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence.⁵²

vi. Other key initiatives

Other initiatives supporting gender justice include:

- National gender mechanisms established by countries, such as ministries for women and gender equality ombudspersons.⁵³
- The Generation Equality Forum, convened by UN Women, which aims to accelerate action on the Beijing Platform for Action.⁵⁴
- Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth-seeking processes and reparations programmes, which United Nations guidance requires to pay special attention to abuses committed against women and to ensure that women receive adequate redress and can participate fully.⁵⁵

V. CONSEQUENCES OF IGNORING THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Failure to integrate gender justice into development policy results in exacerbated inequalities, ineffective interventions and unsustainable outcomes. Gender-blind policies risk reinforcing existing hierarchies and excluding half the population from the benefits of development. Sustainable development without gender justice remains incomplete and unjust.

VI. THE WAY FORWARD

Achieving gender justice requires a holistic and intersectional approach. Legal reforms must harmonise personal laws with constitutional values and international human rights standards. Gender equality must be mainstreamed across all development policies, budgets and institutions. Challenging patriarchal norms within marriage and family structures is essential for enabling women's full participation in society and for achieving sustainable development.

⁵² Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence art. 1(1)(a), May 11, 2011, C.E.T.S. No. 210.

⁵³ Fourth World Conference on Women, *Platform for Action*, ¶¶ 201, 232(e), in Rep. of the Fourth World Conference on Women, *supra* note 41, annex II.

⁵⁴ GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM, *About*, <https://forum.generationequality.org/about> (last visited Oct. 4, 2026).

⁵⁵ U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL, GUIDANCE NOTE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL: UNITED NATIONS APPROACH TO TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE 5 (2010) (Guiding Principle 4).

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that gender equality is essential for promoting social justice, economic development and environmental sustainability. Gender-responsive policies foster inclusivity and resilience. The study underscores the significance of tackling the cumulative disadvantages encountered by marginalised women and gender minorities. Women, particularly in rural regions, are among those worst affected by climate change, and their participation in climate decision-making and in the management of natural resources such as water is essential.⁵⁶ The paper concludes that gender equality is both an ethical imperative and a viable strategy for promoting sustainable development. Policies targeting gender disparity foster more inclusive and sustainable societies. The study advocates the incorporation of gender equality and intersectionality into decision-making procedures, and seeks to enhance understanding of how gender equality can serve as a catalyst for sustainable development. It underscores the need for gender-responsive policies and an intersectional approach to attain the SDGs and to promote inclusive societies.

⁵⁶ UN WOMEN & U.N. DEP'T OF ECON. & SOC. AFFS., *supra* note 2, at 14, 20.