



**Sustainable Consumption and Production, Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights<sup>i</sup>**  
Thursday, July 12, 2018

**Key Data on Unsustainable Consumption and Production Patterns**

- **197 people** were killed in 2017 for standing up to the governments and companies that steal their land and harm the environment, calling out the corrupt and unjust practices that enable it;
- **21,251 people** were identified as victims of trafficking or forced labor since 2014, from every part of the world (UNODC), **12,641(59%) were women and girls**, forced to work primarily in informal sectors like domestic work and in poorly regulated sectors like agriculture, in which they frequently face other abuse and violence, including sexual abuse and violence;
- The agro-industrial system results in **1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted every year** while almost **1 billion people go undernourished** and another **1 billion hungry**, while at the same time, **2 billion people globally are overweight or obese**, including children;
- Each minute, **1 million plastic bags** are used, and the typical bag is used for 15 minutes before being discarded, according to Plastic Oceans. By 2050 there will be more plastics than fish in the oceans, already a plastic-waste 'continent' floats in the Pacific Ocean, and **women working in plastic industry have 5x elevated breast cancer risk** (Canadian study, see 'Women and Chemicals' WECF);
- Products and food can contain many hazardous chemicals, especially endocrine disrupting substances, plasticizers and also pesticides, that are linked to diseases affecting women, such as infertility, PCOS, obesity, diabetes or breast cancer. (GGEO, WHO/UNEP report on EDCs 2012);
- **900,000 deaths and 2 million diseases from pesticides occur annually**; the majority of food producers in Sub Saharan Africa are women whose health is impacted (Global Chemical Outlook UNEP)
- Polluting fossil fuel and nuclear industries are still being vested in countries, moving the world away from the necessary transition to safe and renewable energy systems. Coal in particular is immensely destructive, requiring in the US alone, on average, **75 trillion gallons of water to run**, while at the same time, producing more than **100 million tons of coal ash** and other waste products every year that contaminate local water supplies.
- Gender and identity affect power relations. Masculine, intersectional identities or heteronormative perspectives impact energy use, consumption patterns and in turn, policies to transition. For example, in Canada, meat consumption is heavily gendered. According to the 2015 CCHS, men consumed **roughly 70% more fresh red meat per capita**, and nearly twice as much processed red meat (such as bacon or ham), and processed poultry as women (WEDO)

**Key messages**

- Implement women's human rights and gender equality, and ensure environmental, ecosystem and animal protection at all levels are a prerequisite for achieving sustainable consumption and production;
- Ensure a just transition away from unsustainable production and consumption, towards a rights-based, toxic-free circular economy. This requires safe and environmentally sound alternative solutions in relation to energy supply and access, transport, food, waste management, etc. that are created with and for the needs of all people, including those with the least access to resources. For example, the production of safe and environmentally sound menstrual hygiene products must also be linked with policies to ensure

inclusive access to these products, including ending the infamous ‘pink tax’ on products marketed to women;

- Ensure women’s rights to a healthy workplace and environment free of hazardous chemicals and waste through regulation;
- Reject ‘false solutions’ and mechanisms that attempt to maintain unsustainable levels of consumption through minor changes in the modes of production and/or by ‘offsetting’ the costs of carbon pollution;
- Land degradation, chemicals and toxic waste, air pollution and declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use, overfishing and marine environment degradation are all are a threatening lessening the ability of the natural resource base to supply food security and causing long-term, irreversible damage to human health and ecosystems;
- Women are exposed are highly vulnerable to hazardous chemicals through products they consume and workplace contamination, which is contributing to the increase of diseases such as breast cancer and reproductive disorders;
- Global conventions must urgently phase out harmful products, chemicals and waste before and during pregnancy, lactation and puberty, and ensure women’s rights to a healthy workplace and environment free of hazardous waste and chemicals.

## Recommendations

- The HLPF declaration paragraphs on SDG12 should specifically mention gender dimensions of unsustainable consumption and production, in particular of pesticides, chemicals, extractives, land and energy systems and (food)-waste (target 12.3 - 12.5);
- Global conventions (target 12.4) need to urgently phase out harmful products, chemicals and ensure women’s rights to a healthy workplace and environment free of hazardous waste and chemicals, through implementation of the convention’s Gender Action Plans;
- Phase out chemicals and highly hazardous pesticides that are well known for harming health and environment;
- Ensure women’s rights and access to information, especially pregnant women, about harmful waste, pesticides and chemicals and their specific health effects on women, and ensure education and awareness raising campaigns on how to halt exposure (add to 12.4) of hazardous chemicals and pesticides and how to reduce exposure;
- As the recycling industry is a main contributor to pollution as long as hazardous substances remain in products, SDG target 12.5 should ensure a “toxic-free circular economy”;
- Industry’s voluntary measures are not sufficient (target 12.6), instead take legal measures against the main polluters such as the plastics, oil, pesticide, electronics, agro- and chemicals industry by holding them accountable and liable for the cost of pollution throughout the product life-cycle, and by phasing out perverse subsidies (target 12.C).

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<sup>i</sup> For reference: See the Women’s Major Group HLPF 2018 Position Paper at <https://tinyurl.com/y7bry64r>