

GENDER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: CASES FROM UZBEKISTAN

IGUALDADE DE GÊNERO E OBJETIVOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL: CASOS DO UZBEQUISTÃO

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to have a better understanding of the role played by the gender equality in an organizational context, especially for gender equity which ensures higher diversity and inclusiveness of the women in corporative structures. This goal is linked to the sustainable development goals (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda, especially with SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities). The article has two main tasks: (1) to describe gender equity and some of the Sustainable development goals and (2) to present some cases in Uzbek organizations to delve into the way they implement corporate social responsibility practices related to these SDGs and improve the condition of their female employees. The used methodology is in two directions: literature study on gender equity and Sustainable development goals and interviews with representatives of five Uzbek organizations. The presented studies conclude that the good management of gender equity could improve the corporative internal environment.

Keywords: Gender Equality. Gender Equity. Organizational Culture. Sdg. Uzbekistan.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é compreender melhor o papel desempenhado pela igualdade de gênero no contexto organizacional, especialmente no que diz respeito à equidade de gênero, que garante maior diversidade e inclusão das mulheres nas estruturas corporativas. Esse objetivo está ligado aos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS) da Agenda 2030, especialmente ao ODS 8 (Trabalho Decente e Crescimento Econômico) e ao ODS 10 (Redução das Desigualdades). O artigo tem duas tarefas principais: (1) descrever a equidade de gênero e alguns dos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável e (2) apresentar alguns casos em organizações uzbeques para aprofundar a forma como elas implementam práticas de responsabilidade social corporativa relacionadas a esses ODS e melhoram a condição de suas funcionárias. A metodologia utilizada segue duas vertentes: estudo da literatura sobre equidade de gênero e Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável e entrevistas com representantes de cinco organizações uzbeques. Os estudos apresentados concluem que a boa gestão da equidade de gênero poderia melhorar o ambiente interno corporativo.

Palavras-chave: Igualdade de Gênero. Equidade de Gênero. Cultura Organizacional. Ods. Uzbequistão.



1 INTRODUCTION

At an organizational level, a company benefits from creating a climate that prioritizes gender equity. A business where both men and women are empowered and treated equally thrives; the employees feel happier and more satisfied, and they feel they have a meaningful job. These aspects are important contributing to higher productivity and efficiency.

As the goal of this paper is to give a better understanding of the role played by the gender equality in an organizational context, especially for gender equity which ensures higher diversity and inclusiveness of the women in corporative structures, the **structure** of the article is: first, there is a short and clear study of the theoretical framework, related mainly to gender equity and gender equality. The understanding of these two terms is important, because it makes clear the second step of this article – presentation of five examples from Uzbekistan with improved gender equity in organizations and some analyses of the outcomes. The third step is focused on discussion of the link of these Uzbek cases to the sustainable development goals (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda, especially with SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities). The fourth and final step is related to formulate some conclusions. The presented studies could be used by those managers who are dedicated to improve the corporative internal environment by gender equity and the emotional health of their employees.

As research shows, there are benefits to applying gender equity policies within organizations, but taking into account the insufficient progress so far, there are definitely some barriers to advancing more in this direction. The simplest barrier is linked to the fact that, despite having benefits, companies (and by this, we understand their management) are not fully aware of the benefits. This can be easily corrected through more awareness campaigns meant to promote gender equity at various levels with an emphasis on the advantages brought to the organization in the short and long term. If we try to understand the problem, the lack of awareness comes from a lack of education, so gender equity starts first in families and schools. Education is not something that will happen overnight, especially in more traditional cultures. It is not enough to teach and share knowledge regarding this topic. Mentalities are more ingrained in communities and families and simply providing the information in schools is not sufficient, but it is still a

beginning. For changing mentalities and cultures, there should be more initiatives at various levels and in a consistent manner over a long period of time. Governments, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and businesses should all be involved in creating cultures in which all genders feel respected and treated fairly and equally.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender equity is sometimes used interchangeably with gender equality. Even if they are two different terms, they promote the same values. According to the United Nations Population Fund – UNPF (2005), there is an important distinction between gender equity and gender equality but one leads to another. Thus, gender equity is about fairness for both men and women, meanwhile, gender equality is about granting equal opportunities and equal treatment to men and women. Sometimes, the two terms are used interchangeably and many confuse them, but the distinction should be known. In this entry, we will focus mainly on gender equity, but as stated above, this leads to gender equality so the concepts are strongly connected. It is not possible to be fair to men and women without offering them equal chances in life. As the United Nations Population Fund (2005) states, “Equity leads to equality”.

European Institute for Gender Equality – EIGE (2016) defines gender equity as the “provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men”. EIGE also emphasizes the risk of using the equity term in a discriminating way (which is the opposite of the concept), meaning to treat women with fairness but “in accordance with the roles that they carry out”. Gender equality which is the final goal for gender equity too is more frequently used by international organizations. In the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, the 5th sustainable development goal addresses gender equality.

Martinez (2022: p. 149) gives a few examples of what gender equity means at home, in the workplace and in sports. There should not be discrimination based on gender in no context. People should be treated fairly and with respect, not differently because of their gender, no matter what this is. There are numerous benefits for gender equity in the community, in our homes and in the organizations where we work. Sometimes, things are

not as they should, so educating people about what gender equity is, what are the advantages, but also what are the risks of disregarding this value for future generations is important.

Educating people from an early age also helps their mental health and creates the foundation for adults who will have children of their own one day and they will teach them about fairness and equality too. Mac Naughton (2002) emphasizes the importance of teaching gender equity starting from "early childhood" and the role of educators in doing so, while some of them might not have the proper tools for that because they have been educated differently.

Most papers in the literature review analyse the relationship between gender equality and profitability or productivity in an organizational context. As we emphasized previously, gender equality is, in fact, the result of implementing gender equity policies. There cannot be equality without the foundation stone of equity. And still, there are a few articles that specifically address the correlation between gender equity and "better business" (Scalerandi, 2023) or between gender diversity and inclusiveness and, respectively, higher profitability (Murdoch, 2023).

Escamilla-Solano et al. (2022) state that organizations should disclose and make their gender policies more transparent in order to both reduce discrimination and increase the financial results of companies. In other words, the benefits are numerous because there is a plethora of positive benefits that follow.

As Crabtree (2023) highlights, "Equity is the investment, equality is the reward, and we all make a profit". It is possible that this is the reason why so many researchers and international organisations focus more on equality instead of equity. Still, this does not diminish the important role played by fairness (equity) in reaching the goal of equality in terms of opportunities and rights for all genders. So, the main difference is like the one between the road and the final destination where equity is the foundation of the road and equality is the desired outcome.

As for the application, both gender equity and gender equality should be implemented in all areas of life: in education, at home, at work and in every interaction between people. Gender should not be a subject of discrimination. Taking into account the benefits of gender equity for organizations, these values should be incorporated in

strategies and policies meant to create a balanced, diverse and inclusive environment at the workplace.

3 A VIEW ON GENDER EQUITY IN ORGANIZATIONS: SOME CASES FROM UZBEKISTAN

The significance of workplace emotions and gender equity becomes clearer when these concepts are examined through the realities of organisational life (Obidov, 2023; Seitz et al., 2024). In Uzbekistan, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has not yet reached full maturity (Ataniyazova et al., 2022). For years, the term tended to refer to visible, outward-facing gestures: donations, sponsorship of cultural events, compliance with requirements attached to foreign investment projects (Islamov & Ataniyazova, 2024). Those elements remain, but in recent years there have been signs of a shift in emphasis. Discussions increasingly consider what occurs within Uzbek organisations themselves: the environment that employees encounter daily, the structures that either enable or hinder their work, and the subtle elements of culture that shape belonging.

This movement has emerged through a combination of influences. International collaborations have introduced external expectations, often in the form of partner requirements or shared project norms. The younger generation of Uzbek employees, more exposed to global work practices, has brought different assumptions about acceptable workplace conditions (Yuldashev et al., 2021). Added to this is the gradual appearance of the Sustainable Development Goals in policy discussions, which, although initially abstract, are becoming reference points for organisational planning (Ataniyazova et al., 2022). Some scientists try to prove the need for the active involvement of stakeholders from the social sphere in the process of joint management and thus to achieve some positive results (Ruskova, at.al., 2025). However, progress is uneven. Certain cultural traits, such as the value placed on close personal relationships and a shared sense of collective responsibility, can foster strong, supportive networks within organisations. Yet these same settings often coexist with deeply rooted hierarchical practices and enduring gender norms that can limit open discussion and slow organisational change. The interaction of these reinforcing and constraining forces results in a CSR environment that is dynamic but rarely straightforward.

The next cases from organisations that have moved past purely declarative commitments illustrate what is possible in Uzbekistan.

FIRST case: One of the most illustrative examples comes from a medium-sized IT company in Tashkent that decided to address a recurring barrier faced by employees with family responsibilities. Before the change, the company followed a strict nine-to-six schedule, which left little flexibility for staff needing to coordinate school drop-offs, medical appointments, or other personal obligations. Women returning from maternity leave were particularly affected, and several had reduced their working hours or resigned altogether. In response to feedback gathered through informal conversations and an internal staff survey, management introduced a flexible hour's policy. Employees were permitted to start and finish their day within a two-hour window, provided they met their contractual weekly hours. While some managers initially feared this would complicate coordination or reduce productivity, the opposite occurred. Over the following six months, absenteeism dropped by nearly one-fifth, and team leaders reported fewer urgent requests for leave. Several employees noted that they could focus more effectively during working hours because they no longer felt pressured by conflicting responsibilities outside the office.

SECOND case: It is an example from the creative sector, demonstrates how relatively low-cost interventions can enhance both workplace culture and performance. A design studio led by women observed that although their team members were highly skilled, interaction between colleagues was often confined to formal project meetings. Misunderstandings sometimes went unresolved until they disrupted workflows. To address this, the studio introduced what it termed peer discussion circles. These weekly gatherings were intentionally informal, held in the communal lounge area rather than a meeting room, and without a fixed agenda. Staff were encouraged to speak about ongoing projects, share professional challenges, or discuss broader issues affecting their work. Over time, the sessions became a trusted space for addressing personal concerns as well, helping to strengthen interpersonal trust and foster cross-project collaboration. An internal climate survey one year later showed a marked increase in positive assessments of workplace atmosphere, with respondents citing the peer circles as a key factor in improving collegial support.

THIRD case: It involves a logistics company operating in a sector where leadership positions have traditionally been held almost exclusively by men. Recognising this imbalance, the company partnered with an international non-governmental organisation to develop a leadership programme for female supervisors. The initiative combined intensive workshops on operational management and strategic planning with individual mentoring provided by senior managers. The first cohort included six women, two of whom were promoted to department head positions within a year of completing the programme. This not only provided tangible career advancement for the participants but also challenged long-standing assumptions about gender roles within the company. Conversations with those who took part revealed that the programme also strengthened informal networks among female employees, creating channels for advice, information sharing, and mutual support that persisted beyond the formal end of the training.

FOURTH case: Higher education institutions, with their dual role as employers and centres of learning, have also begun integrating internal CSR principles into their structures and everyday operations. At one private university in Tashkent, senior leadership initiated a comprehensive review of institutional policies after concerns were raised during staff consultations about gaps in addressing harassment, gender equity, and mental health support. The result was a revised code of conduct that explicitly outlined the university's commitments in these areas. This document was not intended to be symbolic; it was accompanied by a concrete support mechanism in the form of a counselling centre staffed by qualified psychologists. The centre was designed to serve both students and employees, offering confidential sessions and, where necessary, referrals to external services. In its first year of operation, the centre recorded steady usage across both groups, with feedback indicating that its presence had made individuals feel more secure in raising sensitive issues.

FIFTH case: Another university approached the integration of CSR principles through capacity-building for its academic and administrative staff. Following an internal diversity audit, the institution designed a training programme focusing on unconscious bias, inclusive communication, and strategies for fostering participation from underrepresented groups. These sessions were interactive and case-based, encouraging staff to reflect on their own practices and to develop action plans for their respective departments. Over time, qualitative observations suggested a noticeable shift in classroom

dynamics, with greater balance in participation between male and female students and a more deliberate inclusion of diverse perspectives in course content. Administrative processes also began to reflect these changes, with recruitment panels incorporating discussions on diversity and equity as standard practice. While neither university claimed that these measures constituted a complete transformation, both saw gradual but steady shifts in campus climate. In staff and student surveys, respondents highlighted a stronger sense of institutional commitment to fairness and well-being. The changes also signalled to the wider community (prospective students, partner organisations, and potential hires) that these institutions were actively engaging with issues of equity and inclusion rather than treating them as secondary concerns.

4 DISCUSSION

The five initiatives described above also align with specific Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrating how internal CSR practices can contribute to broader international agendas. The flexible working hours policy at the Tashkent-based IT company directly supports SDG 5 on Gender Equality by enabling women to remain in the workforce after maternity leave, and it contributes to SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth through improved retention and reduced absenteeism. The women-led design studio's peer discussion circles similarly address SDG 8 by fostering a supportive, inclusive work environment that enhances collaboration and productivity, while also promoting SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities through the creation of open spaces for dialogue across staff roles. The logistics company's leadership programme for women aligns with SDG 5 by breaking down barriers to advancement in a male-dominated sector and supports SDG 10 by broadening access to leadership opportunities.

In higher education, the revised code of conduct and counselling services at one university contribute to SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being by addressing mental health needs, SDG 5 by embedding gender equity in policy, and SDG 8 by creating a safer and more equitable work and study environment. The staff training programme on unconscious bias and inclusive communication at another institution reinforces SDG 5 by addressing structural inequalities, SDG 4 on Quality Education by ensuring inclusive teaching practices, and SDG 10 through efforts to reduce systemic barriers in both

academic and administrative processes. These examples show that internal CSR is not only about improving organisational climate but can also be a vehicle for advancing globally recognised development objectives.

The assessment of such initiatives is most effective when it combines multiple sources of evidence. Retention data, promotion rates, and survey scores can document shifts in measurable indicators. At the same time, qualitative accounts (comments from staff, observed changes in meeting dynamics, even informal remarks during breaks) capture subtler transformations in organisational climate. A few institutions have started experimenting with digital feedback platforms to allow anonymous reporting and periodic well-being checks. Although not yet widespread, these tools illustrate a gradual recognition that internal CSR requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment, rather than reliance on static policy documents.

Another important barrier to gender equity can be linked to the psychological reluctance to change which manifests in both individuals and organizations. At first, people and organizations might fear that change will not be good and are not willing to disrupt the status quo of things. Besides awareness campaigns and education focused on the value of fairness and equality starting from an early age, families play an important role too. Parents and grandparents should educate their boys and girls to respect each other and not make any difference based on gender, not only outside the house but also within the comfort of the family. Even if it is difficult, things will change for the better with newer generations that are more informed in relation to these issues and the risks they might pose for a society that is not based on equity and equality.

At the international level, there are many organizations fighting for both the equity and equality of women. UN Women focuses on promoting equality but also empowering women. In some traditional cultures, it is very important to make women understand that they have the same rights as men and that they should invest in their education, aspire to a career and even to leadership positions. It is not enough to have the same rights in theory, organizations should encourage women to access the opportunities and use their rights for a better and happier life for themselves, their families and the future generations.

Other organizations fighting for women are Women for Women International, the Center for Reproductive Rights, Rise Up, the European Institute for Gender Equality, the International Alliance of Women, and many others. The European Institute for Gender

Equality (2022) also provides a Gender Equality Index for the member states in the European Union. The average index in the EU in 2022 was 68.6, where 100 is for full equality. At the global level, there is also a Gender Inequality Index provided by Human Development Reports (2022). The average index is 0.465, where 1 is the highest level of inequality. In this case, the lower the score the better.

No matter if it is called gender equity or gender equality, the main goal is the same: to provide all genders equal rights and opportunities without any discrimination. There are many barriers to achieving this, mostly related to the lack of education and empowerment in women, but also to mentalities, fixed cultures and reluctance to change. With educational campaigns and a concerted effort of both public and private organisations, things will go in the right direction.

If these focus on the benefits, progress will slowly become a norm. The advantages consist of higher financial results, productivity, and increased satisfaction at the workplace, but also in having a community where all genders can bring their gifts in order to prosper. Diversity and inclusiveness, gender equity and equality are values that should be promoted starting from early age, in families and in schools. Only in this way, obsolete mentalities will change and disrupt the status quo of things.

5 CONCLUSION

Gender equity is about fairness to all genders being more general and having a broader sense which paves the way for gender equality which is a final goal focused on equal rights and opportunities for all genders. Even though there are barriers to reaching these goals, the benefits are more important and should be promoted constantly. Governments, schools, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and mass media should all be involved in awareness campaigns meant to raise the level of knowledge regarding gender equity, the advantages of a more evolved society and the way the change can be done. There is a direct correlation between having gender policies implemented at work and increased financial results. This should be an important determining factor for companies to be more diverse and inclusive towards women.

The Uzbek cases illustrate what is achievable within a particular cultural and institutional framework, while simultaneously prompting reflection on the adaptability of

these practices to other environments. Analysing changes over time in measures such as goal commitment, the strength of social networks, levels of isolation, and self-assessed performance makes it possible to identify which patterns are resilient across settings and which are shaped by local contingencies. These distinctions are essential for developing CSR strategies that are both culturally responsive and organisationally effective.

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Authors’ Contribution:

Author 1 has contributed to: “Introduction” and “1 Theoretical Framework” and “3 Discussion” and “Conclusion”.

Author 2 has contributed to: “2 A view on gender equity in organizations: some cases from Uzbekistan”.

Author 3 has contributed to: Abstract, Introduction, Acknowledgement and technical design.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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