

**Goal Five: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.**

Gender equality. We are a long way away from achieving this goal! After all, when approximately half of the global population seems to benefit from inequality perpetuated along gender lines - where is the motivation to change or restructure the way we view the roles of women and girls? This is not a problem specific to Tanzania or to Zambia or any other country across the diverse African continent. Gender inequality is also a glaring issue back in Canada. This is especially true when we think about Indigenous women in our country. We are a long way off from achieving equality!

Where do we even begin to start addressing goal five? What are meaningful entry points? Despite the gaping gaps between men - women and boys - girls worldwide, it is also important to keep in mind that there are strong, courageous girls and women making their voices heard every day in every country on the globe. These ladies are not silent, nor are they waiting around to be empowered. Quite frankly, they have too much to do to.

Goal Five wants to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” which sounds very nice and equitable. However, the concept of empowerment is an interesting one. Women are not victims waiting for someone else to empower them. They work too hard and have already demonstrated tremendous strength which has allowed them to continue to survive despite rampant inequality. Women and girls do need justice! They need equal access to education and economic opportunities. They need quality healthcare and the space to make choices that are best for them and their bodies. This is a bit of a different way to think about empowerment. It is not the women and girls themselves who need personal empowerment (although there are times and places for that as well). The systems and social constructions that actively work together to disempower women need to be changed and eradicated in order for the voices and goals of women and girls to be heard. A few of the target goals of goal five focus on ending discrimination and violence against women but this can only be done if we start looking at why these practices continue in the first place.

When contemplating intervention strategies in Tanzania, listen to the voices of women in Tanzania. What are they asking for? What do they see as problematic? What does equality look like to them? Many of the women that I have met in the last few months have expressed frustration with how little their husbands listen to them. This indicates that when it comes to encouraging equality, a key priority to these women is that they are respected in their personal relationships by their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers. YES - education is incredibly important as is increasing the number of women involved in decision making positions. However, to many women some of these interventions can seem quite far off and they are more concerned with inequality at home. Interventions at the domestic level are often more challenging as they are also more personal in nature.

Likewise, Canadian women also have a pretty good idea of the changes they would like to see. The interventions I would like to see in a Canadian context are also in the domestic sphere but in a different way. It is time to start raising our girls to be strong and confident and to teach them

that being quiet and agreeable is rather overrated. Girls need to learn to stand up for themselves so that they can ask for that raise or fight discrimination in the workplace later in life. This particular intervention does not address the fact that as a country we treat minority groups of women, especially Indigenous girls and women differently. Addressing our national mistreatment and general neglect of marginalized women will require intentional interventions that shift cultural attitudes. This will not be easy to do and will require the dedication of men and women from Indigenous, Immigrant, and Settler backgrounds working together to fight for justice for those who go missing and to advocate for sensitization across Canada on issues relating to gender-based violence.

In closing, I will list a few small recommendations of my own. These steps are not enough, In order for the Sustainable Development Goals to truly be effective, governments and citizens need to 'buy in' to them and work hard to make them a reality. We cannot simply leave the SDGs to others and so my recommendations look at what individuals can start to do themselves and hopefully we will see significant changes when it comes to gender inequality over the next fifteen years.

#### Recommendations

1. Start listening to the girls and women in your life!
2. Think twice about the way you treat young girls versus young boys in your life.
3. Look at your own relationships. Are you promoting equality in your friendships as well as romantic relationships?
4. Pressure government and non-government bodies to act on the SDGs and focus on structural changes.