

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

Young Voices in Development – Achieving Gender Equality

Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

The Sustainable Development Goals touch all humans, regardless of nationality, race, age, income, or gender. Thus, goal five achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls is no exception. All people of the world – Canadians, children, men, Zulus, high income earners, women, South Africans, elders, informal business owners, chiefs, and many more groups of people – are needed to ensure that gender equality is reached in Canada, South Africa, and the 200+ other countries on the planet. This is an ambitious goal but one that offers incredible learning, dialogue, and opportunity along the way.

Entry Points in South Africa

Our work in South Africa has exposed us to many amazing people and stories along the way. Sadly, there are several instances of gender inequality present on a daily basis. As is the case with so many issues, if children learn about something – such as gender equality – in a just, wholesome, and age-appropriate manner, they will be more likely to exhibit this positive learning as a behaviour in their future. Thus, there is no better place to start the conversation, and model appropriate gender equality and empowerment of girls than at a primary school, such as Slangspruit Public Primary School in Pietermaritzburg, where we work.

There are numerous ways in which gender equality can be modeled and taught in South Africa, namely in the primary school system. Firstly, grade four to grade seven students take life skills as a subject and cover a wide range of topics including peer pressure, puberty, and other important pre-teen matters. If this could be expanded to include gender equality, even as an introduction, it would be a great starting point to raise the profile of gender equality. At times it seems as though traditional roles, even in the simplest of tasks such as who will mop the floor, are always followed and deviating from domestic duties being completed by women would be unthinkable. Other entry points include using assignments in English and drama to reinforce gender equality. Schools must support the matter in every aspect of the students' day, every day, with equal treatment, examples, and opportunities for girls. Of course, this is just one avenue to gender equality, the avenue that I have experienced in South Africa. It is the avenue that I have and will continue to ensure that there is gender equality in my work here.

Entry Points in Canada

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

Canada arguably has a more complex version of gender inequality that needs to be addressed. Some may argue that gender equality has improved over the last few decades in Canada. However, I would challenge this statement by engaging in dialogue around the housework, the workplace and in popular media. Firstly, housework is still done, for the most part, by women. One of the sub points of the Sustainable Development Goals on Gender Equality states that the world needs to 'recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work'. This certainly is an entry point for gender equality in Canada. This is compounded as women work full time jobs to support their families and return home at the end of the day to their second job of managing the household. Furthermore, in the workplace, women are still not paid the same amount for the equivalent position as men. Finally, Canada's sports and popular culture industries have room for improvement in terms of gender equality. For example, gender equality is needed in all sports, from the amateur level through to the professionals. Equal media attention, the sexualization of female athletes, equal parental support for athletics, and positive female role models are all areas within the sporting community that could use some education and attention for gender equality. There are similar issues in popular culture.

Recommendations and Conclusion

I have recommendations on how to promote and achieve gender equality that span across national boundaries. Equal treatment of men and women needs to be modeled from a young age and continued in the home, school, workplace, and in the media. Men play a large role in gender equality and need to meet women half way (or more) to ensure that this SDG is reached by 2030. Women's networks, equal representation of men and women in workplaces, politics, and other traditional male and female dominated sectors, gender equality curriculum in schools, and the media taking on gender equality are all areas that will play a large role in countries such as South Africa and Canada offering equal opportunities for males and females in the future.