Sustainable development is the focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were agreed by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. This is the first unified, universal agenda which integrates social, economic and environmental objectives for all national governments over the 2016-2030 period. The role of knowledge is recognised as being important to development by many international organisations, national governments, civil society and academia, but the role of knowledge in processes of sustainable development requires more attention. The thesis focuses on how new, promising modes of knowledge production and exchange might be able to support the transformational role of knowledge in sustainable development. After establishing the relevance of these new modes, a longitudinal action research study investigates the role of social capital and local knowledge among rural women living in circumstances of purdah (female seclusion) in rural Bangladesh. The thesis concludes that new modes of knowledge production and exchange can create new local knowledge and local capacities which contribute to self-sustaining, endogenous change, presenting new insights into the nature of sustainability.