

BEHIND THE GAP: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INDIA'S LAGGING PERFORMANCE IN GENDER EQUALITY IN SDGS

Harshad Laxman Jadhav

Head, Department of Economics & Ph.D. Research Centre, Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's,
Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil College Vashi, Navi Mumbai

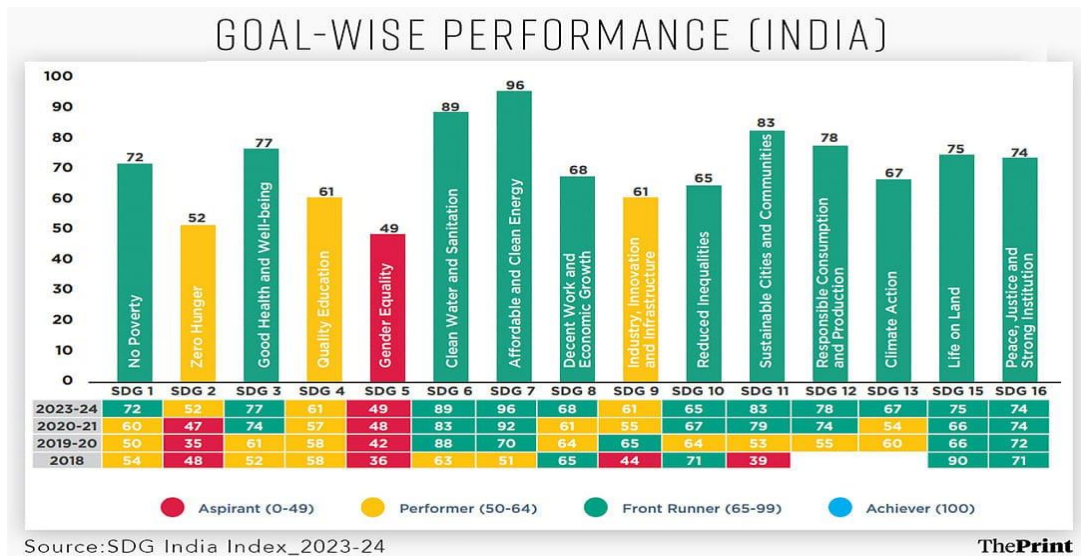
ABSTRACT

India's think tank NITI Aayog released its recent Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index in July showing significant improvement in various SDG indicators like poverty eradication, clean water and sanitation, affordable energy, etc. but not in gender equality. This research paper tries to highlight the reasons responsible for India's poor performance in achieving gender equality, an important indicator of Sustainable Development Goals. This paper highlights the reasons behind gender inequality in India from data collected through primary and secondary sources and also suggests actionable steps to address them. This paper aims to provide pathway for accelerating progress towards achieving gender equality in India.

Keywords: SDG, NITI Aayog, Gender Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality and empowering girls and women is the fifth goal of the SDGs. What is SDG? Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals that addresses the global challenges and blueprint to achieve a sustainable future for all. These goals are launched and adopted by United Nations Members in 2015. In NITI Aayog's recent report, 15 SDGs scored above 50 but only SDG-5 i.e. Gender Equality scored 49, which is below 50, which indicates its aspirant status. In 2020-21, The score of SDG-5 was 48 and in recent index it is 49. It is improved by just one score, which is a concerning issue for India. India has taken several initiatives to improve gender equality, provide safe and secure environment, enforce legal framework, financial assistance, educational opportunities still India has shown poor performance in SDG-5. Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana, Haryana, Manipur, Tripura, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh are some aspirant states and Chandigarh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu are some aspirant UTs which scored below 50 in SDG-5.



Achieving gender equality is of utmost importance for measuring India’s overall development and socio-political progress. GDP wise India is 4th largest economy in the world, ahead of so many developed countries. But if we talk about Gender Inequality Index 2024, India’s overall rank is 129. In so many reports, global indexes India lags behind where we can see a paradox which indicates economically, we are developing but socially and in terms of welfare we are far behind. We have a long path to walk.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the secondary sources which were collected through newspapers, authorised government websites, magazines, surveys published by the governments and ministries, Global institutional reports. The methodology used in the research paper is data analysis. This paper has analysed the factors behind India’s poor performance in gender equality indicator of SDG. The paper also highlights the current trends in different indicators like violence against woman, their political representation, opportunities provided to them, female labour force participation, etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. ‘Gender Equality and Human Rights in India’ by Kritika and Raghubar Prasad Singh. This research paper focuses on challenges and issues faced by women, what are the factors responsible for gender inequality in India and how to promote gender equality in India. They analysed the gender equality from the perspective of human rights. This research was based on the secondary data.
2. ‘The State of Gender Inequality in India’ by Singh Sumanjeet. The research paper focuses on widening gender gap in India. Despite high economic growth, gender inequality and gender gap remains a concern for the Indian economy.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the reasons responsible for India's poor performance in achieving gender equality in SDGs.
2. To highlight the key challenges faced by females in society.
3. To investigate how economic disparities contribute to gender disparities in India.
4. To examine traditional gender roles and cultural norms that perpetuate inequality in India.
5. To Compare India's progress on gender equality with other countries.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA

1. Educational Disparities

Women's education in India is significant for socio-political and economic progress of India. According to NHFS, there is improvement in enrolment rate and educational opportunities provided for women but still there are some areas where girls often face barriers such as inadequate sanitation facilities, safety concerns, certain kinds of violences, preferences for boy's education, etc.

2. Socio-economic factors

According to data released by Ministry of Statistics, Periodic Labour Force Participation Rate 2022-23, Female Labour Force Participation in the country significantly improved by 4.2% and it jumped to 37.0%. It is still lower than some of India's neighbouring states.

According to Ministry of Labour and Employment's 'Female Labour Utilization in India' 32.8% of female aged 15 years and above are participating in labour force in India's against 77.2% male.

Household duties, migration due to marriage and other reasons, low access to education and finance, poor status in decision making, etc. are some of the reasons responsible for wide gap between male and female in labour force participation in India.

3. Cultural and social norms

India's deeply rooted patriarchal society causes various forms of gender discrimination which influences family structures, inheritance laws, orthodox rituals and mindset, societal expectations result in gender inequality.

4. Health and Nutrition Gaps

Women in India face significant challenges in accessing healthcare and nutritional diet due to high cost, poverty, family rituals of eating last, etc. leading to malnutrition and related health issues such as anaemia, stunting and wasting.

5. Gender disparity in wages

Females in India also faces pay gap, disparity in wages, low wages for same works compared to men. Tamil Nadu has the highest agri-gender wage gap. Gujarat has the highest gender wage gap among the salaried class.

6. Child Marriage:

According to UNICEF reports, estimates suggest at least 1.5 million girls under age 18 get married in India each year. India has highest number of incidents of child marriages.

According to the National Family Health Survey, 40% of the world's 60 million child marriages take place in India.

Traditional system, land ownership related issues, economic barriers, pressure from relatives, gender biases, safety and security problems, etc, factors are responsible for child marriage in India.

7. Political representation

As of the latest figures, women's representation in the Indian Parliament is about 14%, reflecting challenges in political empowerment. The representation in State Legislative Assemblies is even poorer which is around 9%.

Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments: As on April 2024, India ranks 143 in the list of countries which is published by Inter-Parliamentary Union, a global organization for national parliaments.

Social norms and stereotypes, unequal opportunities, lack of access to education, limited representation in political parties, patriarchal mindset, etc. are some of the reasons responsible for women's poor participation in politics in India which is even lower than its neighbouring countries.

8. Poor policy implementation

In India gender equality policies exist but sometimes implementation can be inconsistent and ineffective due to lack of political will, poor accountability mechanism, inadequate resources.

9. Violence and safety

According to NCRB report, India records 51 cases of crime against women every hour, more than 4.4 lakh cases in 2022. In 2021, India recorded 4.28 Lakh cases and in 2020, 3.71 Lakh cases. Over the years we can see number of cases related to violence are rising against woman.

INDIA'S RANKING IN GLOBAL GENDER EQUALITY RELATED INDEXES AND REPORTS

1. Global Gender Gap Index (2023):

Ranking: India ranked 127th out of 146 countries. This index, published by the World Economic Forum,

2. Gender Inequality Index (GII) (2021):

Ranking: India ranked 122nd out of 166 countries. The GII, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

3. Women, Peace, and Security Index (2023):

Ranking: India ranked 133rd out of 180 countries. This index, developed by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, measures women's inclusion, justice, and security

4. Maternal Mortality Rate (2023):

Ranking: India's maternal mortality rate is approximately 130 deaths per 100,000 live births.

5. Sustainable Development Goals Index released by NITI Aayog

Gender Equality score: 2023-24 :49
2022-23: 48

6. India is among top 10 worst countries for political violence targeting women in 2022.

SUGGESTIONS

- India has its own set of rules and regulations still there is scope that India can learn from other countries successful examples and models to achieve gender equality. The 17th goal of SDG is Partnerships for the goals. So, India can work in cooperation with other countries to achieve gender equality.

Here are some successful examples of countries which have taken some steps to achieve gender equality.

1. Finland's Gender -neutral education has led to achieve high literacy rates and academic excellence.
2. Sweden's gender sensitive pedagogy has resulted in increased participation of girls in STEM subjects.
3. Denmark's 'Flexicurity' model which gives flexible work hours arrangements have resulted in high female labour force participation and better work-life balance.
4. Scotland's free products have reduced period poverty and improved menstrual health.
5. Rwanda's quota system and Pakistan's reserved seats models for political representation for women resulted in rise in females' participation in politics. Rwanda has the 61% parliamentary seats held by women which is highest in the world.
6. Argentina's gender identity laws have led to increased recognition and rights for transgender individuals.
7. New Zealand's pay transparency laws requires companies to disclose gender pay gaps to address gender wage disparities.
8. Iceland's "Equal Pay Standard" certification encourages companies to show equal pay practice, promotes fair compensation.
9. Mexico's "Gender-responsive budgeting" ensures government budgets address gender disparities.

- In India there is no centralised direction for paid menstruation leave and law is not available which governs menstrual leave.

Zomato allows its female workforce to take 10 days of paid leave annually during their menstrual cycle.

Sikkim High court introduced menstrual leave policy for its women employees.

Various countries in the world provides like Japan, Korea, Zambia, Indonesia, etc., provides menstrual leaves. India should also work in this direction to provide good health and well-being to ensure continued work consistency.

- Promote gender-neutral school textbooks, curriculum to promote gender equality.
In this regard, Kerala government has taken steps. They introduced gender-neutral images in school textbooks which shows father also doing household duties, working in kitchen challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes.
- Provide defence education to girl and boy students in schools and colleges, so they can protect themselves. Similar initiative taken by schools in Bihar in this regard resulted in increase in enrolment of girl students. 2389 government schools have self-defence training sessions for the girls.
- Strengthen legal frameworks, enhance economic opportunities, improve healthcare services, address violence, promote education, encourage political participation, etc. are some of the steps need to take to promote gender equality.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality is multi-dimensional issue deeply rooted in socio-economical and historical factors. In this research paper, we have identified India's ranking in different indexes and reports, where India's performance is worst. Large population is one of the reasons which contribute to India's poor performance but always India cannot hide behind this excuse. We have a long path to walk. India's patriarchal norms influence the behaviour and gender roles that restrict the opportunities for female. Household duties, traditional rituals, societal restrictions make them more vulnerable when it comes to pursue their career.

In 2023, United Nations Secretary Antonio Guterres said in his speech, gender equality is "vanishing before our eyes". According to latest estimates of UN Women, UN organization dedicated to gender equality, "Gender equality is 300 years away" which raises serious concerns for all the countries in the world.

In this research we asked females about their opinion on gender equality, the common shared view was 'Women's career is also career like men. Don't force them to sacrifice it because of household duties and lower pay.' Some other opinions were 'Parents should take responsibility to inculcate the habit of gender equality among their child whether it is boy or girl about shared household roles, equal opportunities for education, career aspirations, etc., because change starts from the home.' Even if one-third population changes their orthodox and patriarchal mind-set, traditional thinking and roles, India can achieve a lot of improvement in gender equality.

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