



GENDER GAPS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA – ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is considered a critical element in achieving social and institutional change that leads to sustainable development with equity and growth. Inequalities between men and women manifest themselves in all areas of development. Inequalities are most obvious in: health and education, economic development, violence against women, participation in public life and policymaking and social attitudes and gender stereotyping. Health discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 933 women to 1,000 men (world average: 990:1,000). Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world and close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one-third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy. In the education sector, the inequalities observed are: Around 245 million Indian women cannot read or write and they form the world's largest number of unlettered women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities within states. Enrolment and retention of girls in education is poor and the average years of schooling for girls is only 1.2 years as against 3.5 years for boys. Girls miss school because they have to look after siblings. A look at the economic development sector indicates that, official data does not reflect the amount of work that women actually do to enable their families to survive, collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working as unpaid labour on family farms. The present study analyses the gender gaps and lists out the strategies in the Twelfth Five Year Plan of Government of India for women's empowerment. The Twelfth Plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It aims to improve the conditions of self employed women with a focus on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women. One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development to promote skill development of women from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. .

KEYWORDS: gender gaps, empowerment, gender gap index

INTRODUCTION

Rural women and girls have many roles and many responsibilities. They are farmers, care-givers, wage labourers and micro-entrepreneurs and they often spend many hours fetching water and collecting firewood. The empowerment of women is fundamental to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Gender equality and women's empowerment are important factors for the social and economic development of a nation. The promotion of gender equality and empowering of women is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to which India is a signatory.

Gender gap

The differences between women and men, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes. The Global Gender Gap measure was introduced by the World Economic Forum to examine four critical areas of inequality between men and women:

1. Economic participation and opportunity – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment.
2. Educational attainment – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education.
3. Political strengthening – results on portrayal in basic leadership structures.
4. Wellbeing and survival – results on future and sex proportion.

The Gender Gap Index evaluates nations on how well they are isolating their assets and opportunities among their male and female populaces, paying little respect to the general dimensions of these resources and openings. India ranks 123 in terms of economic participation, 121 in educational attainment, 134 in health and survival and 17 in political empowerment. India, with 1.3 million elected women representatives, has the largest number of women participating in local governance among the Asian countries, exceeding its own 33% reservation. A study of Indian local governments by Munshi and Rozenweig (2008) said that women in local government roles came out with better outcomes for communities in budgetary decisions and were more competent in procuring resources despite significantly lower education and labour market experience, so politically empowering women is a good thing.

Gender Pay Gap in India

Various Articles of the Constitution of India attempt to ensure that there is no prevalence of gender pay gap. Specific legislations also address gender pay gap. These articles of the constitution are as follows:

- **Article 14:** Men & women to have equal rights & opportunities in the political, economic & social spheres.
- **Article 15(1):** Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.
- **Article 15(3):** Special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women.
- **Article 16:** Equality of chances in matter of open arrangements for all subjects.
- **Article 39(a):** The State will coordinate its arrangement towards anchoring all subjects people, similarly, the privilege to methods for occupation.
- **Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- **Article 42:** The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and Maternity relief.

Programs, Mission and Strategies for Empowerment of Women

A few of the Programs, Missions and special provision for women's empowerment being adopted by the Government of India have been discussed below.

National Mission for Empowerment of Women India

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GOI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with a view to empower women socially, economically and educationally. The Mission aims to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different ministries/Departments of Government of India as well as State Governments. The Mission utilises existing structural arrangements of participating Ministries wherever available and partners with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in implementation of activities. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

Focus areas of the Mission

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women.
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12.
- Higher and Professional education for girls/women.
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information.
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women.

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of India (2001)

Goals and Objectives

The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include.

- (i) Creating a domain through positive financial and social strategies for full improvement of ladies to enable them to understand their maximum capacity.
- (ii) The by law and true pleasure in every single human right and major opportunity by ladies on equal basis with men in all circles – political, monetary, social, social and common.
- (iii) Equal access to support and basic leadership of ladies in social, political and financial existence of the nation.
- (iv) Equal access to ladies to medicinal services, quality education at all dimensions, profession and professional guidance, employment, approach compensation, word related wellbeing and security, government managed savings and open office and so forth.
- (v) Strengthening legitimate frameworks went for end of all types of discrimination against ladies.
- (vi) Changing societal states of mind and network rehearses by dynamic cooperation and inclusion of both men and ladies.
- (vii) Mainstreaming a sexual orientation point of view in the advancement procedure.
- (viii) Elimination of segregation and all types of brutality against ladies and the young lady kid.
- (ix) Building and fortifying associations with common society, especially ladies' associations.

Provisions under Twelfth Five Year Plan of India

Economic empowerment

The Twelfth Plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It will improve the conditions of self employed women. Focus will be on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

Skill development

One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. Training of women as BPO employees, electronic technicians, electricians, plumbers, sales persons, auto drivers, taxi drivers, masons, and so on will be incorporated in the skill development programmes. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women.

Strategies: A three-pronged approach

Women can be powerful change agents. Empowering poor rural women involves three critical and interrelated dimensions: expanding access to assets such as capital, land, knowledge and technologies; strengthening decision-making and their representation in community affairs; and improving women's wellbeing and lessening their workloads.

The lack of basic amenities affects women more than men, as women are often responsible for a larger share of time-consuming household activities. Better electricity and access to water and sanitation may reduce the burden of women in providing essential household inputs for their families, and allow for more time to be directed toward entrepreneurial activities.

According to National Statistical Commission Chairman Pronab Sen, rural women are shifting towards self-help groups and self-employment, which is clear from the percentage of women taking up self-employment rising to 59 percent in 2011-12 from 56 percent in 2009-10. Also, it could also be that a large segment of rural women are not being categorized in the employable workforce in the WPR, as their activity may be designated as family household chores.

John Coonrod (2013) has suggested the following ways in which programs need to be designed to help and empower women.

1. Gender analysis. Too often, gender is an afterthought in project design. Often, mid-project it is discovered that women are not participating and then steps are taken to empower women to participate in a program that simply does not work for them, only adding further burden and anxiety.

2. Reducing drudgery. Working on an average twice the hours of men, women don't have time for development. They are the first to rise and the last to go to bed, often with the most backbreaking work: hauling water and firewood, pounding grain, weeding farms using short-handed hoes and with children on their back, head-carrying produce to market and working as labourers.

3. Rights awareness. Many of the women are confined to their households and lack mobility and freedom of association and have no opportunity to learn their rights and take action to improve their lives and those of their family members. Even if they are aware they are not culturally tuned to assert themselves.

4. Equal leadership. Women are denied a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Leadership among women can be greatly accelerated by mentoring, building an organized constituency among the women of the community, leadership training and building federations with other women leaders.

5. Organize. Investments in building strong grassroots women's organizations, federations and cooperatives provide women sustainable platforms for advocacy and mutual empowerment.

6. Functional Literacy. Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women. Around 245 million Indian women cannot read or write the world's largest number of unlettered women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities within states.

7. Financial services. Women need credit not only for starting or supporting small enterprises, but also for coping with great seasonal fluctuations in family income. Several studies have shown that women spend money, on the health, nutrition and education of children than when men control the money.

8. Health services. Access to affordable health services is a fundamental human right for women and their children.

Table: 1 Literacy rate and Gender gap in India-1951 to 2011

Census year	Males	Females	Male-female gap in literacy rate
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India 2011.

Table: 2 Sex Ratio of Population in India: 2001, 2011

Residence	2001	2011	Change
Total	933	943	+10
Rural	946	949	+03
Urban	900	929	+29

Table: 3 Work Participation Rate and Gender Gap India: 2001, 2011

Residence	Sex	2001	Gender	2011	Gender	Change
		%	Gap	%	Gap	
Total	Person	39.1	26.1	39.8	27.8	+0.7
	Male	51.7		53.3		+1.6
	Female	25.6		25.5		-0.1

Source: worked out based on Census Data.

Table: 4 Type of Workers and Gender Gap India: 2001, 2011

Residence	Sex	2001	Gender Gap	2011	Gender Gap	Change
Main Workers	Person	77.8	30.0	75.2	22.7	-2.6
	Male	87.3		82.3		-5.0
	Female	57.3		59.6		2.3
Marginal Workers	Person	22.2	-30.0	24.8	-22.7	2.6
	Male	12.7		17.7		-5.0
	Female	42.7		40.4		-2.3

Source: worked out based on Census Data.

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