

Progress and Hurdles: India's Pursuit of Gender Equality under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-5

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Abstract:

This research paper focuses on Sustainable Development Goal-5 (SDG-5) in India and analyses the government's efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The study examines various programs such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila E-Haat, PM Ujjwala Yojana, and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, among others, to assess the progress made towards achieving SDG-5 targets. The findings suggest that India has made significant strides in addressing gender disparities and improving women's socio-economic status in various sectors. However, despite notable achievements, several challenges persist, hindering the full realization of SDG-5 objectives. This paper provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of government interventions, identifies areas for improvement, and offers recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to advance gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in India.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-5, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila E-Haat, PM Ujjwala Yojana.

Introduction:

Development is the measure we humans have created to measure the progress of our countries or societies. Our belief has been that development will benefit mankind, but no one is able to explain at what cost this development is occurring. As we progressed through industrialization, our environment suffered its consequences. When wood, water, and electricity for fuel became scarce, we realized that natural resources are limited and could eventually run out, halting our economic activities and production system. It was then necessary to develop a model of development that was consistent with nature's endurance, and that is how the concept of sustainable development came about.

The Brundtland Commission (1987) defines sustainable development as a process that takes into account present needs as well as future needs. The concept of sustainable development isn't limited to the environment, but now it encompasses a lot more. To meet the diverse needs of diverse communities, it advocates providing equal opportunities. The UN then introduced Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations and its member countries adopted Agenda 2030 on September 25, 2015, committing to achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Gender Equality is the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to be set by the United Nations as

one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also recognized in the Constitution of India that gender equality is an enlightened principle in the Preamble and the Fundamental Rights, as well as in the Directive Principles of Government Policy. The Indian Constitution contains one of the most significant provisions that empower the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women under Article 15(3), which is probably one of the most important provisions in the Constitution. There is also the remarkable fact that the National Commission for Women was set up in the year 1992 primarily to address complaints of violations against women's fundamental rights, to provide advice on aspects of socio-economic development for women and to protect their legal rights.

India is faced with both opportunities and challenges when it comes to achieving gender equality, given the socioeconomic disparity and cultural norms that exist. Although a great deal of progress has been made in various aspects of gender empowerment, there are still persistent inequalities and barriers that hinder progress. The objective of this study is to identify key challenges, analyse the factors contributing to progress, and propose strategies to overcome them in India with regard to SDG 5. The Indian government has made significant progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) in a number of areas. For instance, the government has launched various initiatives and policies to promote gender equality and empower women, some of the significant initiatives are:

Major initiatives taken by government to achieve SDG 5 and their progress

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao(BBBP)

As a flagship initiative of the Government of India, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" (BBBP) aims to address gender inequality and promote girls' education and welfare. This campaign, started in 2015, seeks to end the deep-rooted preference for male child over females and the resulting neglect and discrimination against them. Three main objectives of the campaign are at its core: first, to enforce laws to prevent gender-biased sex-selective practices; second, to make sure girls are protected, educated, and survived; and third, to create an environment that fosters girls' empowerment and education.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls in 2019-20 has increased to 90.5% (from 88.5%) at Upper Primary level, 98.7% (from 96.7%) at Elementary level, 77.8% (from 76.9%) at Secondary level, and 52.4% (from 50.8%) at Higher Secondary level.

Between 2012-13 and 2019-20, the Gross Enrolment Ratio for girls in higher secondary education has increased by 13%. The percentage was 39.4% in 2012-13 and 52.4% in 2019-20. In comparison to boys, the increase is greater. In 2019-20, the GER for boys in high school is 50.5%, up from 40.8% in 2012-13. The GER for girls has increased more than the one for boys between 2012-13 and 2019-20. From 68.2% in 2012-13 to 77.8% in 2019-20, the GER for girls in secondary school has gone up by 9.6%.

After this initiative taken by the government, positive growth has also seen in Sex Ratio at Birth (SBR), SBR shows the number of female birth per 1000 Male birth.

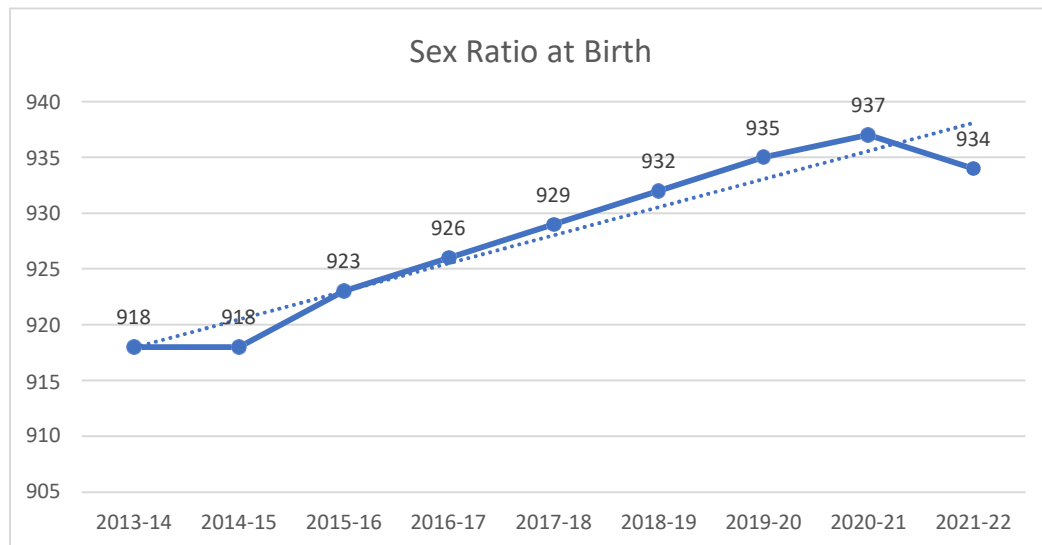


Figure 1 Trend- Sex ratio at Birth at All India Level

Source: HMIS Annual report 2021-22

The above graph shows the data published in the Health management Information System (HMIS) report 2021-22. According to the data, SBR in India was 918 in 2013-14, which has increased to 934 in 2021-22.

Mahila E-Haat

The Ministry of Women and Child Development and Rastriya Mahila Kosh have launched Mahaila E-Haat as part of Digital India and Make in India initiatives. The project was launched on 7th March 2016 by Hon'ble Cabinet Minister Maneka Sanjay Gandhi. The Mahila E-Haat provides a unique online platform for Indian women entrepreneurs over 18 years old. By mobilizing and providing better paths for development, this portal is aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs.

PM Ujjwala Yojana

Rural households in India face a major challenge in obtaining clean cooking fuel. Women and children are mainly affected by this deprivation because they are exposed to the harmful effects of smoke from burning unclean fuels. In order to safeguard the health of women and children, the Government of India launched Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) on 1 May 2016. As part of the scheme, five crore deposit-free LPG connections will be provided to women who belong to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households in the Socio-Economic & Caste Census 2011 and who suffer from at least one deprivation. In February 2018, the Government revised the target of five crore deposit-free LPG connections to eight crore LPG connections. Due to this, the initial budget of 8000 crores was increased to 12800 crores (February 2018).

One Stop Centres

One Stop Centre Scheme was approved by the Department of Health and Human Services for implementation on 1st April, 2015. It is the aim of the scheme to facilitate access to an integrated range of services which include medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/case management, psychosocial counselling, and temporary support services for women who have been affected by

violence.

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)

In 2015, the government-backed Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) was launched to promote the welfare and financial security of Indian girls. This scheme encourages parents to save for their daughter's education and marriage expenses. Parents who have a girl child below the age of 10 can invest in the scheme through designated public and private banks. When the daughter turns 21, the plan becomes mature. During a financial year, the minimum deposit amount is Rs. 250 and the maximum deposit amount is Rs. 1.5 lakh. A 7.6% annual interest rate will be offered. The account holder receives a payout of accumulated savings and interest upon maturity, providing a financial cushion for future endeavors. Through the provision of a structured savings platform and attractive returns, the scheme not only promotes saving culture, but also addresses the economic challenges associated with education and marriage expenses, contributing to the overall goal of gender equality and female empowerment.

Below table shows the outstanding deposits & number of bank account open under the scheme Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

Table 1 Bank Accounts Opened Under Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

End of FY	No of Accounts	Outstanding Deposits (in cr.)
2015	420420	123
2016	6998870	6773
2017	10084152	17156
2018	12428910	31958
2019	15534417	50224
2020	19249624	72880
2021	23267968	101258

Source:<https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/jan/doc20221207101.pdf>

Challenges

Achieving gender equality and empowerment for women and girls is the primary goal of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). It is difficult for India to realize this goal due to several challenges:

Gender-Based Discrimination:

Across all facets of Indian society, there is a deep-rooted tradition of patriarchal attitudes and practices. This necessarily results in discrimination against women and girls in various spheres of life, including education, employment, and decision-making. According to the Gender Inequality Index (published by UNDP in Human Development Report 2022), India ranks 108th out of 193 countries in terms of reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market equality. With a score of 0.437, the country has a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality in the country.

Violence Against Women:

In India, violence against women remains widespread. This includes domestic violence, sexual harassment, and dowry-related violence. There are many reasons why such violence undermines the human rights of women, but they are also hindering their ability to participate fully in society as well.

Table 2 Crime against Women in India

2019	Crime Incidence		Crime Rate		Percentage variation		
	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019-20	2020-21
405326	371503	428278	2019	56.5	64.5	-8.30%	15.30%

Source: NCRB

Education Access is Limited in India: Even though efforts are being made to improve access to education in India, there are still significant gender disparities in the field of education. It is evident that girls often face barriers in their education due to poverty, cultural norms that favour boys' education, and safety concerns as they make their way to school.

Gender Wage Gap: There is a gender wage gap in India, where women often get paid less than men for similar work, contributing to economic disparities among women as well as perpetuating gender inequality within the country.

Women's Representation in Politics: There is a lack of representation of women in Indian politics, both in elected offices and at the level of decision making. This lack of representation hampers efforts to address gender-specific issues and advocate for policies that promote gender equality.

Conclusions

In India, the journey towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has revealed both advancements and obstacles along the way. Despite significant progress in areas such as education and legislation reforms, significant challenges still remain, including pervasive gender-based violence, entrenched societal norms, and persistent gender disparities in access to resources and opportunities.

As a country in the process of advancing SDG 5, it is essential to adopt a multifaceted approach in order to tackle these challenges as comprehensively as possible. A comprehensive approach to addressing these issues includes rigorous implementation of current laws and policies, targeted interventions to improve access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women and girls, as well as concerted efforts to challenge discriminatory attitudes and promote cultural changes that are gender-sensitive.

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