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Women and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: A Overview

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted via the United Nations (UN) in 2015, provide a global blueprint for tackling key social, environmental, and economic challenges. As a country with a diverse and significant population, each country's progress towards these goals presents unique opportunities and challenges. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a visionary roadmap towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all which was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and came in to effect on 1st January 2016. Countries are primarily responsible for following up and reviewing the progress made in implementing the goals and targets at the national level till 2030. Women's empowerment is crucial for sustainable development, as it significantly influences economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability. Gender equality is prominently emphasized in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which aims to empower women and girls. In India, women have historically faced marginalization due to entrenched social norms, encountering barriers in education, employment, and political participation. However, challenges persist in achieving gender parity, particularly in terms of political representation and access to education and health care. Countries are expected to take ownership and establish a national framework for achieving these goals. Implementation and success will depend on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes. The 2030 Agenda also underscored the fact that quality, reliable and disaggregated data would be needed for measurement of progress on the targets and for ensuring that No One is Left Behind. In this paper, an attempt is made to reveal the Sustainable development goals implementation and women for the sustainable future.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Women, Implementation, United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

A Decade ago, world leaders gathered at the United Nations and made an unprecedented commitment to leave no one behind and to transform our world by 2030. The countries have learned since then are that sustainable development is not just a destination, but rather a journey of innovation, adaptation and commitment to human dignity. At the heart of SDG implementation sets the need for strong monitoring mechanisms. The Global Indicator Framework (GIF), comprising 248 indicators, was established by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators to track progress towards the goals. Additionally, at the national level, countries like India have developed their own National Indicator Framework (NIF), personalized to address national priorities and align with existing policies and programs. With 284 indicators in the NIF, it serves as a crucial instrument for policymakers and implementing agencies to steer efforts towards achieving the SDGs. By fostering cross sectorial collaboration and emphasizing data driven decision making, the significant frameworks play a pivotal role in ensuring meaningful outcomes and sustainable development for all.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This objective is essentially linked to numerous other SDGs, highlighting the integral role of gender equality in the pursuit of sustainable development. Research indicates a significant interconnection between SDG 5 - Gender Equality, SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation, and SDG 8- Decent Work and Economic Growth. Achieving gender equality is essential for effective engagement in and benefits from water related and employment initiatives, thereby augmenting the potential for sustainable tourism development and economic growth. Additionally, SDG 3- Good Health and Well-being is intricately linked to SDG 5, as gender influences health outcomes through social elements, health behaviours, and gendered responses of health systems. Efforts to advance gender equality have demonstrable impacts on health, underscoring the necessity for integrated action across these domains. Climate change adaptation measures significantly intersect with Sustainable Development Goals 5. These measures present both synergies and trade-offs; while they have the potential to advance gender equality, they frequently fall short in sectors such as ocean and coastal ecosystems or poverty alleviation unless gender equality considerations are explicitly incorporated into planning and implementation. The role of small businesses, particularly within the African context, underscores that heightened awareness and integration of SDG 5 can enhance gender equality in business environments, thereby supporting broader sustainable development objectives. Integrating gender equality across all Sustainable Development Goals is essential for achieving comprehensive progress. For instance, education SDG 4 significantly influences gender equality; conversely, gender equality can enhance educational outcomes. Furthermore, the empowerment of women can expedite progress towards other SDGs, such as poverty reduction SDG 1 and peace and justice SDG 16. Nevertheless, despite these interconnections, awareness and implementation at the grassroots level remain challenging, particularly in business and institutional contexts. Advancements in gender equality facilitated by feminist mobilization have driven progress across various domains within the Sustainable Development Goals framework. However, substantial gaps persist, particularly in sectors that are resistant to change or where political and financial obstacles remain. On-going efforts to integrate gender considerations across all SDGs are crucial for achieving the 2030 agenda.

Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Countries

Global Indicator Framework - The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) of United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) was, created in March 2015 to develop and implement the Global Indicator Framework (GIF) for monitoring the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The GIF was developed by the IAEG-SDGs and agreed upon, by United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2017 which was subsequently adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017. At present, the GIF includes 248 indicators, with 231 unique indicators.

National Indicator Framework - India is committed to implement the SDGs based on the nationally defined indicators responding to national priorities and needs. In this effort, towards integrating SDGs into country's on-going national and sub-national policies and programs, at national level, NITI Aayog has mapped the SDGs with centrally sponsored programs of different Central Ministries/Departments. The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda requires governments to work across policies and set ambitious and interrelated economic, social and environmental objectives that go beyond short- term political cycles. Monitoring and evaluation are essential for assessing the extent to which policies and resource allocations for implementing the SDGs result in meaningful outcomes. It is evident that reliable data is the backbone for better monitoring of SDGs and also require for data driven decision making policies. Towards this endeavour, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation developed a National Indicator Framework (NIF) in 2018 consisting of 306 national indictors along with identified data sources and periodicity following due consultation process with concerned Ministries and Departments, United Nations Agencies and other stakeholders. NIF is the backbone for facilitating monitoring of SDGs at the national level and provides appropriate direction to the policy makers and the implementing agencies of various schemes and programmes. There were 286 indicators in the NIF, 2022.

A total of fourteen indicators have been identified at global level to monitor the progress of these targets whereas at national level a total of twenty nine indicators have been identified. Although SDG 5 specifically stresses upon Gender Equality and Empowerment of all Women and Girls, yet gender equality is necessary to achieve all of the goals. For example, eliminating poverty would be impossible if women, almost half of the population, remain poor. The same argument is also true for several other SDGs. Similarly, gender indicators are spread across the SDG indicator framework.

The United Nations premiere entity working for gender equality and the empowerment of women, has indicated that there are fifty four gender specific indicators across the SDG Global Indicator Framework (GIF) and around over one quarter of these are found in SDG 5. The Minimum Set of Gender Indicators is a collection of fifty one quantitative indicators and eleven qualitative indicators measuring and collecting information on issues relevant for gender equality and women's empowerment. The indicators are organized into five themes such as Economic empowerment, Education, Health and related services, Public life and decision making, and Human rights of women and girl children. Each domain addresses one or more critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action, and is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals Indicator framework.

Over the past decade, significant progress has been made in strengthening data systems to support SDG monitoring. In 2025, a comprehensive review of the global indicator framework – endorsed by the Statistical Commission – introduced key updates to better reflect today’s challenges, including climate change, inequalities and digital transformation. These changes have improved the ability of countries to track progress and to develop evidence based policies.

The SDG monitoring framework was first established in 2016, at that time only one third of indicators had good data coverage, and thirty nine per cent lacked internationally agreed methodologies. Today, almost seventy per cent have good coverage, and all 234 indicators have well established methodologies. SDG data availability shows encouraging overall progress between 2019 and 2025 but with determined gaps in key areas. Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing, Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation, Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy and Goal 17 - Partnerships for the Goals demonstrate substantial improvements, with Goal 7 achieving the highest trend data coverage at over eighty per cent. However, Goal 5 - Gender equality, Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities, Goal 13 - Climate action and Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions continue to lag significantly, at below thirty per cent of trend data coverage. These disparities highlight critical blind spots in monitoring, revealing the priority development areas that require targeted investment as 2030 approaches.

While national ownership is essential in setting and owning the data agenda, many countries particularly low and lower middle income nations are continue to face significant technical constraints. These are reflected in the priority areas that countries have identified within three key domains such as statistical operations, internal organizational functioning and key technical areas. Data from hundred reporting countries show that in 2023 the proportion of total government spending on essential services such as education, health and social protection averaged around forty six per cent to sixty per cent in advanced economies and forty three per cent in emerging market and developing economies. While spending on essential services has trended upward for both economic groups over the past two decades, the gap between the two groups remains stable at approximately twenty percentage points. The gap is mainly attributed to the higher spending for social protection fifteen percentage points and, to a lesser extent, health five percentage point in advanced economies.

Global hunger showed signs of improvement in 2024, with 8.2 per cent of the population undernourished – down from 8.5 per cent in 2023 and 8.7 per cent in 2022, though still above 2015 levels. An estimated 638–720 million people faced hunger. Progress was driven by improvements in South America, Southern Asia, and South eastern Asia, while hunger continued to rise in Northern Africa and Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In 2024, hunger affected 22.3 per cent of people in sub-Saharan Africa and 11.8 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

In 2023, the global health workforce was estimated at over seventy million, with fifty two million in the five key occupations such as dentists, medical doctors, midwifery personnel, nursing personnel and pharmacists. A global shortage of 14.7 million health workers persisted in 2023, down from 15.4 million in 2020. The shortfall is projected to decline gradually to 11.1 million by 2030, with over half concentrated in Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. While the global density of the five key occupations rose by twenty six per cent between 2013 and 2023, vast inequities remain: high-income countries average one health worker for every sixty four people, compared to one for every 621 people in low-income countries. High and upper middle income countries, which account for fifty three per cent of the global population, employ eighty per cent of workers in these five key professions and consequently have the highest densities. But these countries will still need to recruit an estimated 8.4 million additional health workers by 2030 to sustain current levels and meet the growing demand driven by population growth and ageing.

Globally, literacy rates have improved over the past two decades, with increases in reading and writing skills and with reduced gender disparities. Despite this, 754 million adults remained illiterate in 2024, with women accounting for sixty three per cent of the total. Youth literacy rose from ninety one per cent in 2014 to ninety three per cent in 2024, with notable gains in Central and Southern Asia from 87 to 94 per cent and sub-Saharan Africa from 75 to 79 per cent, while Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand saw little change at 73 per cent. Adult literacy increased globally from 85 to 88 per cent over the same period, led by Central and Southern Asia from 70 to 77 per cent. However, the rates remained low in Oceania 67 per cent and sub-Saharan Africa 69 per cent. Europe and Northern America continue to lead, with a youth literacy rate of ninety nine per cent and an adult literacy rate exceeding ninety eight per cent.

Adequate school infrastructure is essential for safe and effective learning. Between 2015 and 2023, electricity access in primary schools increased globally by over ten percentage points, mainly driven by rapid expansion in Central and Southern Asia. Internet access within schools has increased notably since the COVID-19 pandemic, and provision of drinking water in the primary schools of sub-Saharan Africa has improved by ten percentage points since 2016. Despite this progress, significant gaps remain. Globally, over twnty per cent of primary schools lack access to electricity, drinking water or sanitation. Fewer than half have computers, Internet or disability adapted facilities. The situation is worse in LDCs, where over a third of primary schools lack basic sanitation, more than half lack electricity and over two thirds lack digital tools; only one in five offer disability friendly infrastructure.

Globally, women occupy less than a third of managerial positions. From 2015 to 2023, their representation increased by only 2.4 percentage points, reaching thirty per cent. At this step, achieving gender parity in management will take nearly 100 years. Progress varies intensely by region. Australia and New Zealand and sub-Saharan Africa lead with over forty per cent of women in managerial roles, followed by Europe and Northern America, and Latin America and the Caribbean at around thirty nine per cent. Meanwhile, central and Southern Asia shows an alarming decline from 15.1 per cent in 2015 to 11.6 per cent in 2023. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia also reversed progress -2.3 percentage points, while in Northern Africa and Western Asia, less than one in five managerial roles are held by women despite a 6.7 percentage point increase since 2015. Systemic barriers to employment and career advancement remain prevalent in these regions.

Women and girls continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work. Global time data underscore a persistent reality as on average, women devote two and a half times as many hours per day to these tasks as men. Women in Northern Africa and Western Asia spend over four times as many hours as men, while women in Oceania and Europe and Northern America spend approximately twice as many hours. The burden is particularly pronounced among the poorest households, where limited resources prevent outsourcing tasks or investing in timesaving tools. This unequal distribution reinforces existing gender roles, limiting women's economic opportunities and perpetuating their marginalization in political, economic and social spheres. Addressing this imbalance requires policies such as improved social protection, investment in care infrastructure and family friendly labour regulations to redistribute care responsibilities and support women's economic participation. Without sustained action, both their rights and their potential will remain reserved.

Since 2015, the share of workers in informal employment has edged upward. By 2024, 57.8 per cent of the global workforce was informally employed, meaning that they were not adequately covered by social security arrangements, legal protection or workplace safety measures. Women are particularly vulnerable in regions where informality is widespread. In 2024, 93.8 per cent of women in LDCs and 91.4 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa were informally employed, compared to 86.4 and 86.0 per cent of men, respectively. Without stronger policies focusing on job quality, informal employment will continue to hinder decent work and inclusive development.

In 2024, approximately 138 million children worldwide engaged in child labour, including 54 million in hazardous work endangering their health and development. This represents a significant decrease from 160 million children four years ago. Since 2000, over 100 million fewer children have been in child labour despite the global child population increasing by 230 million. However, the world missed its ambitious target of ending child labour by 2025. To achieve the target within the next five years, the current rate of progress would need to quicken. One in three women in South and Southwest Asia are married or in a union by the age of 18, with 8.5% of women aged 20-24 married by the age of 15. This is the highest global rate.

In countries with available data, women hold agricultural land at rates far lower than men. The largest disparity is in Fiji, where women hold 3.6% of agricultural land compared to men’s share of 96.4%. Even in Armenia, Georgia and Thailand, which have the smallest gest gaps, women still hold less than half the share of agricultural land compared to men.

Urban residents report nearly double the discrimination rate of their rural counterparts. Women are twice as likely to face gender-based discrimination. Persons with disabilities face discrimination at twenty eight per cent compared to the seventeen per cent for those without disabilities. Economic status strongly correlates with discrimination and the poorest quintile reports a 17.3 per cent rate versus the 10.3 per cent rate reported by the wealthiest. Education matters as individuals with no formal education face a 21.4 per cent rate nearly double that of those with higher education 12.7 Percent. Age shapes the reasons for discrimination. Youth 15–29 years more often report discrimination based on migration status, ethnicity and sexual orientation, while older adults 60+ years encounter age, disability and health-related discrimination.

Killings and disappearances of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists remained terrifyingly high in 2024, with at least 502 killings documented across forty four countries and 123 disappearances documented across thirty seven countries. Northern Africa and Western Asia continues to be the most incurable region for journalists, while Latin America and the Caribbean remains the deadliest region for human rights defenders. Confinements of defenders also surged, with at least thirty one countries recording at least ten new cases in 2024, especially concentrated in Central and Southern Asia and in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

Persistent challenges continue to delay progress in protecting life on land, managing natural resources sustainably and combating the biodiversity crisis. Global forest cover is shrinking and protection of key biodiversity areas (KBAs) has hindered recently, and species extinction is accelerating. Yet, there are signs of progress such as global forest loss are slowing, and regional advances are showing ability. Voluntary land restoration commitments would cover two thirds of what is needed. Conservation of KBAs has steadily increased over two decades through successful global site level efforts. Biodiversity related official development finance has also shown a positive trend.

Limited civil society participation in urban planning and management remains a major barrier to inclusive and sustainable urban development. A 2024 survey of 152 cities in fifty countries found only 19 per cent of cities- twenty nine cities demonstrated strong civil society participation in urban planning, while eighteen per cent showed medium participation, thirty five per cent low participation and twenty nine per cent very limited or no participation. This lack of civic engagement in decision making processes threatens urban equity, effective service delivery and trust in institutions – disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities and slum dwellers. To enhance inclusive urban development cities must invest in forceful systems to empower and facilitate meaningful participation by all population groups in the planning, managing, budgeting and decision making processes.

Major Challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in India

India, home to around 1.3 billion people and an exceptionally diverse socio cultural environment is essential to the global pursuit of the SDGs. As the world's largest democracy and among the signatories of the United Nations SDG agreement documents additionally the fastest growing economies, India's progress or setbacks significantly affect global metrics. However, its large and diverse population, attached with a range of economic and social disparities, also presents considerable challenges. India faces multiple difficulties and bottlenecks in achieving the SDGs. Socio economic Disparities - India's vast population and diverse socio economic landscape present significant disparities across regions, communities, and social groups. These disparities contribute to unequal access to resources, opportunities, and services, exacerbating the challenges of poverty eradication SDG 1, quality education SDG 4, and reducing inequalities SDG 10. Institutional and Policy Challenges - Inadequate institutional capacity and policy implementation gaps pose significant challenges. Weak governance structures, administrative inefficiencies, and corruption hinder the effective implementation of SDG related policies and programs. Population Growth and Urbanization- Urbanization and population increase at a rapid jump exercise pressure on resources, infrastructure, and service delivery. The demand for housing, healthcare, and basic amenities in urban areas strains the capacity to provide sustainable cities and communities SDG 11 and decent work and economic growth SDG 8. Data and Monitoring - Timely and accurate data collection and monitoring are crucial for effective policymaking and tracking progress toward the SDGs. India faces challenges in data collection, data quality, and monitoring mechanisms, which can impact the formulation of evidence based policies and targeted interventions. Lack of Effective Multi stakeholder Collaboration - To achieve desired results in any SDG multi stakeholder collaboration needs to be identified and established. There is a lack of such effective collaboration at all levels in India. In order to overcome these obstacles, thorough policy reforms, capacity building, and multi stakeholder collaborations at various levels are needed.

Recommendations for Effective Implementation of SDG’s

1. **Strengthening Institutional Capacity**: Enhance institutional capacity at various levels to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of SDG related policies and programmes. Participation in capacity building, training, and knowledge transfer to empower government agencies, local authorities, and other stakeholders is needed. A separate autonomous body may be an effective solution for policymaking to implement, review and monitor SDGs efforts by implementing partners.
2. **Empowering Marginalized Groups**: Prioritize the needs and rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women, children, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities. Ensure their meaningful participation, access to resources, and protection from discrimination are necessary in achieving the goals.
3. **Ending violence against women** and girls means addressing the most serious manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination that deprives women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities. Addressing this violence would widen the opportunities for women to complete their education Goal 4, participate in paid employment Goal 8, and increase their income Goal 1, which can also reduce their social and economic vulnerability. Furthermore, it would reduce women’s risks of physical harm, which can lead to poor health and wellbeing Goal 3.
4. **Ensure women’s full and effective participation** and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life. Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws.
5. **Strengthening Policy Integration**: Enhance policy coherence and integration across sectors to address the inter linkages among the SDGs is the major one. This includes aligning national and state

level policies with the SDGs and integrating them into sectorial plans and programs. Stakeholder efforts in India are not formally mapped to SDGs and therefore it is a critical requirement to code all social, environmental, and economic activities by stakeholders linking with seventeen SDGs by the United Nations.

6. **Mobilizing Financial Resources**: Mobilize domestic and international financial resources to support SDG implementation is also needed to promote innovative financing mechanisms, public private partnerships, and social impact investment to bridge funding gaps. It is crucial to approach the SDGs holistically, acknowledging the interconnected nature of the goals and targets. This requires an inclusive and participatory approach. India may accelerate its progress towards sustainable development and make a significant contribution to the worldwide endeavours aimed at reaching the SDGs, by implementing these above suggestions.

CONCLUSION

The Sustainable Development Goals represent a visionary roadmap towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all authorised by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and came in to effect on 1st January 2016. Encompassing seventeen goals and 169 targets, the SDGs address the interconnected dimensions of social, economic, and environmental development. They emphasize inclusivity and cooperation on a global scale, urging nations to work together to ensure that no one is left behind. While not legally binding, the SDGs serve as a significant international commitment, influencing national policies and funding priorities up to 2030. Each country is tasked with taking ownership of the goals, establishing frameworks for implementation, and monitoring progress using reliable and disaggregated data to uphold the principle of leaving no one is behind. In conclusion, India's journey in the direction of accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals is marked by both progress and challenges. While notable steps have been made in areas such as poverty reduction, health, education, and clean energy, significant gaps remain in achieving other goals such as gender equality, decent work, and sustainable cities. India encounters a variety of complex problems in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress is hindered by socio economic biases, institutional and policy hurdles, environmental deterioration, population expansion, and data restrictions. Nevertheless, India has showcased its dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals by implementing policy reforms, employing creative strategies, and achieving notable success in several areas.

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