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GENDER EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT



Gender Inequality

The United Nations defines inequality as "the state of not being equal, notably in terms of status, rights, and opportunities." Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for both women and men. Every citizen has the right to live their life according to their wish without any discrimination. It is possible when all individuals are considered equal irrespective of caste, religion, language, colour, profession, status and sex. Biased gender social norms are major barriers to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Persistent differences and disparities between men and women have negative implications for society as a whole. Women represent half the resources and half the potential in any society. This potential remains unrealized when women are constrained by inequality and discrimination.

Gender equality is considered a critical element in achieving Decent Work for all women and men. In the context of the world of work, equality between women and men includes the following elements:

1. Equality of opportunity and treatment in employment
2. Equal remuneration for work of equal value
3. Equal access to safe and healthy working environments and to social security
4. Equality in association and collective bargaining
5. Equality in obtaining meaningful career development
6. A balance between work and home life that is fair to both women and men
7. Equal participation in decision-making at all levels

Given that women are usually in a disadvantaged position in the workplace compared to men, promotion of gender equality implies explicit attention to women's needs and perspectives. At the same time, there are also significant negative effects of unequal power relations and expectations on men and boys due to stereotyping about what it means to be a male. Instead, both women and men, and boys and girls, should be free to develop their abilities and make choices without limitations set by rigid gender roles and prejudices based on personal interests and capacities.

The ILO has adopted an integrated approach to gender equality and decent work. This means working to enhance equal employment opportunities through measures that also aim to improve women's access to education, skills training and healthcare while taking women's role in the core economy adequately into account. Examples of these include implementing measures to help workers balance work and family responsibilities, and providing workplace incentives for the provision of childcare and parental leave. According to the International Labour Organization, India has an enormous income disparity between men and women. 1/4th of the time, women get paid 34% less than men.

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals

UNESCO believes that all forms of discrimination based on gender are violations of human rights, as well as a significant barrier to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Its message is clear: women and men must enjoy equal opportunities, choices, capabilities, power and knowledge as equal citizens. Equipping girls and boys, women and men with the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to tackle gender disparities is a prerequisite to building a sustainable future for all.

UNDP has made gender equality central to its work and we've seen remarkable progress in the past 20 years. There are more girls in school now compared to 15 years ago, and most regions have reached gender parity in primary education.

UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

Goal's targets

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- 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.
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Gender Inequality in India

India was ranked 142 out of 149 nations in the **2018 Global Gender Gap Report**. This report measures gender inequality on the basis of four areas - Economic involvement and opportunity, health and survival, educational attainment, and political empowerment. According to the India Human Development Survey, women make up about 42% of the

agricultural labour force in the country, although they control less than 2% of the country's farmland (IHDS).

Reasons for Gender Inequality in India

- Women continue to bear the primary responsibility for caring for their families and raising their children.
- Women are typically considered suitable for "pink-collar positions," such as teachers, nurses, receptionists, babysitters, and lecturers, stereotyped women. This limits their options in other areas.
- Many women are forced to leave the workforce due to family obligations.
- Companies want to hire more young women since it is widely accepted that the work-family environment, marriage, and pregnancy drives a married woman to resign.
- In comparison to men, women get paid less for the same task.

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pioneered the Gender Inequality Indicator, a new index for determining gender disparity, as per the 2010 HDI Report, 20th anniversary edition. This score, according to the UNDP, is a composite evaluation that quantifies the loss of success within a nation owing to gender inequality and does so using three dimensions:

- Reproductive health
- Empowerment
- Participation in the labour market

GII shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0 - 1, where 0 indicates women and men fare equal, and 1 symbolizes gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions. The 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) report, released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on June 12, 2023, covers following highlights about India. According to the HDI Report 2023 India ranks 122nd out of 191 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, this reflects the inequality between men and women in terms of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market.

- The report reveals a shocking stagnation in the GSNI score over the past decade for India, despite numerous movements advocating for gender empowerment and representation. This lack of progress in addressing inbuilt biases raises concerns about what it means for India—a developing country burdened by caste, entrenched

biases against women, and deeply-rooted stereotypical cultural beliefs that often go unchallenged.

- According to the latest UNDP report, over 99.22 per cent of people in India hold at least one bias against women, while over 86.26 per cent hold at least two biases. The report reveals that 92.36 per cent of men and 92.43 per cent of women share a bias against a woman's physical integrity, as indicated by factors such as intimate partner violence and reproductive rights.
- In essence, around 92.39 per cent of people in India justify intimate partner violence (physical or emotional abuse) in some way or believe that women should not have reproductive rights. The report argues that these biases are reflected in society.
- The Crime in India-2021 report indicates that the majority of cases registered under crimes against women were categorised as "Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives" (31.8 per cent), followed by "Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Her Modesty" (20.8 per cent). This is followed by "Kidnapping & Abduction of Women" (17.6 per cent) and "Rape" (7.4 per cent).
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau's "Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2021" report, the proportion of female victims who died by suicide was highest in cases related to "Marriage Related Issues" (specifically, "Dowry Related Issues"), followed by "Impotence/Infertility."
- Considering labour, income, and bias, it is concerning to note that even countries with very high human development scores, such as Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, and Sweden, experience a disparity of at least 10 per cent in the labour force participation rate between men and women. For India, a country classified under the medium human development category with a rank of 132 out of 191 countries, the picture is even more daunting.
- The UNDP report states that around 75.09 per cent of the population in India holds an economic bias against women's right to work and their rank in the workplace. This means that over 80.38 per cent of men and 67.87 per cent of women in India believe that men make better executives than women.
- According to the report, the estimated gross national income per capita (2017 PPP \$) for men is \$10,633, nearly 4.6 times higher than women's estimated gross national income of only \$2,277. Income gaps directly correlate with the opportunities utilised by both genders. However, the prevalence of opportunities and the right to work are often hindered by matrimony or maternity.

- As of 2021, the female labour force participation rate is only 19.2 per cent; nearly 3.6 times lower than that of males. The average income gaps between women and men persist, despite a declining disparity in education between the genders.
- According to the GSNI report, only 38.50 per cent of the population believes that university education is more important for men than for women. However, education alone has proven insufficient in addressing the gender gaps in the labour force.
- The Oxfam India Discrimination Report 2023 reveals that women spend up to six times more time on domestic chores and care work in countries highly biased in gender social norms. This highlights a strong correlation between income disparity and existing gender roles and biases.
- India's rank in the World Economic Forum's gender parity ranking has declined to 135, 48 positions lower than its 2016 rank. This places India well below its South Asian neighbours such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, China, and Sri Lanka.
- Moving forward, the report emphasises that gender biases are deeply ingrained in society and hinder gender equality. These biases reflect widely shared social norms and pose challenges to achieving a gender-equal society. The report concludes that challenging biased gender social norms must be a choice that individuals willingly make..

(Ref - <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/the-latest-undp-report-reveals-biases-against-women-worldwide/article66985325.ece>, June 19, 2023)

The index, covering 85 percent of the global population, reveals that close to 9 out of 10 men and women hold fundamental biases against women. Nearly half the world's people believe that men make better political leaders than women do, and two of five people believe that men make better business executives than women do. Gender biases are pronounced in both low and high Human Development Index (HDI) countries. These biases hold across regions, income, level of development and cultures—making them a global issue.

Key challenges in achieving gender equality

- It begins with our families; children witness inequalities related to gender at homes and communities every day. Boys and girls are differentiated in terms of what activities and sports they play, food, education, etc. They grow up with these age-old ideas of gender-appropriate behaviour and responsibilities deeply embedded in their behaviours.

- In most families, women remain confined to handling domestic chores and looking after the well-being of their children and elders. The lack of a support system, especially in nuclear families, is reported to be the biggest barrier for women entering education and paid work, as they struggle to balance professional duties with family responsibilities. Further, finding a job that can help balance work and family is tougher for women.
- Culturally there is an inherent belief that men are better equipped to handle certain tasks. This perception results in fewer jobs earmarked for women. Even when they work in the same occupation, women are often paid lower than men. Workplaces often also lack the infrastructure necessary to provide women with a safe space for growth and development. These barriers make it difficult for women to grow or thrive at the workplace.

How to Achieve Gender Equality in India?

Women's and girls' education is a vital component that helps in gender equality. By obtaining proper education, the door to many new opportunities will open up for women. When they get skilled can easily find employment. Employment will empower them and will give them financial independence, alternative sources of social identity, and exposure to power structures independent of kin networks. It will give them the independence to make decisions of their own choice. The path of gender equality can be further reduced at work by reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps.

Another crucial step towards gender equality is eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres. Apart from it, it is essential to eliminate all harmful practices by society, such as early and forced marriage, the dowry system, etc. We should try to make our environment and surroundings more safe and healthy for women and girls.

Women should try to come into power through leadership roles in all sectors. This will increase the presence of women in different fields and motivate other women and girls. Power in the hands of women will ensure their full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. Women's equal rights to economic resources also promote gender equality. They get access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources through this right.

The Government has taken various steps to promote Gender Equality. They launched various women empowerment schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, One Stop Centre Scheme, Women Helpline Scheme, UJJAWALA, , National Mission for Empowerment of Women etc. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, GOI, has been working towards achieving it by mainstreaming gender concerns and facilitating institutional, nutritional, and legislative support for enabling women in achieving their full potential. Despite the efforts, progress towards achieving equality has been moving at a snail's pace.

This signifies a need for a mind shift -beyond policy reforms to bring in gender equality. Families must take the lead and be the frontrunner of change. Examples set at home by parents, caregivers and extended family to the next generations will play a greater role in shaping notions about gender and equality. It is critical to break down gender stereotypes at home, from an early age, by involving girls in financial decisions and the participation of boys in household chores. Families should invest equally in empowering girls with better education, life, and sports skills.

There is a need to eliminate gender-based roles, stereotypes, and discrimination while hiring. Many companies have developed comprehensive diversity and inclusion policies, widespread acceptance of a strategic and important role for women is still a long road to traverse. Within organisations, effective mentorship programmes driven by women leaders would support and empower women employees in their career development and growth. By making such programmes an integral part of the company culture, leaders can help in ensuring greater satisfaction, retention, and promotion among women employees.

Conclusion:

As the world marches towards achieving gender equality, all stakeholders must commit to affirmative action and a mind shift to eliminate inequalities in all spheres. Affirming gender equality at home is a meaningful start in the right direction, and organisations need to bolster that with support for all genders at the workplace. Let us all pledge to do our part and make our workplaces gender neutral and build a truly just and resilient world.

(Reference: Internet Resources)

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