

Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in India

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ABSTRACT

A critical aspect of gender equality is the empowerment of women and girls, ensuring they have autonomy, participate fully in decision-making, and benefit from increased access to resources. Gender equality benefits everyone by leading to stronger economies, more stable and just societies, and greater overall human potential. It is a core objective for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing global challenges such as poverty, health, and education. Despite progress, significant challenges remain. Gender inequality persists in most aspects of life, with women still facing barriers in employment, access to resources, and decision-making roles. Achieving gender equality is an ongoing effort requiring continued policy reforms, investment in women's empowerment, and a shift in societal norms and stereotypes

Keywords: Gender equality, women empowerment, sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

In India, where women comprise 50% of its population, the importance of Women Empowerment spans various dimensions including socio-cultural, economic, and political among others. Overall, promoting gender equality and women empowerment is important for the overall development and progress of the nation.

We believe that gender equality is not just an issue—it's a fundamental human right that benefits everyone in a community! Gender equality means ensuring that individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It's about creating a world where everyone is free from discrimination and stereotypes.

Here are a few reasons why gender equality matters:

1. When women and men can contribute equally to the economy, communities prosper. Equal participation leads to increased productivity and innovation!
2. Promoting gender equality helps combat violence and discrimination, fostering safer, more inclusive communities for all.
3. Diverse voices lead to better decision-making and creative solutions. Empowering everyone to contribute enhances our collective effectiveness.
4. Gender equality contributes to improved health outcomes for women and children, ensuring that all individuals have access to necessary resources and support. Let's come together to challenge stereotypes, advocate for equal rights, and empower individuals of all genders! By supporting one another and standing up for equality, we can build a brighter, more inclusive future

How Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment are Achieved

- **Challenging Social Norms:**
This involves addressing discriminatory attitudes and power structures that limit opportunities for women and girls.
- **Legislative and Policy Changes:**
Enacting and enforcing laws to prevent discrimination, protect women's rights, and ensure equal access to education, employment, and resources.
- **Economic Empowerment:**
Providing women with equal access to land, property rights, financial institutions, and decent employment to foster independence.
- **Education:**
Ensuring equal access to quality education for girls and women to develop their knowledge, skills, and leadership potential.
- **Ending Gender-Based Violence:**
Eliminating violence and harmful practices like child marriage, which are pervasive human rights violations.
- **Promoting Leadership:**
Increasing the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, from households to national governments.
Why They Are Important
- **Human Right:**
Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental human rights, allowing individuals to live with dignity and freedom.
- **Sustainable Development:**
These are essential for achieving all of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as they are integral to inclusive and sustainable development.
- **Economic Growth:**
Empowering women leads to increased productivity, economic growth, and inclusive prosperity, as women are crucial drivers of economic change.
- **Stronger Communities:**
Empowered women contribute to the health and well-being of families and communities, improving prospects for future generations.

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in India

The government has launched several programs for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in India. Major Women's Empowerment Programs in India are discussed below:

Overall Empowerment of Women

- **National Policy for Empowerment of Women:** Aims to bring about overall advancement, development, and empowerment of women.
- **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):** Aims to strengthen overall processes that promote the all-around development and empowerment of women.
- **Gender Budgeting:** Gender Budgeting is being implemented in India to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Socio-Cultural Empowerment of Women

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana (BBBP):** Aims to improve the child sex ratio and ensure the education and empowerment of girls.
- **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE):** Focuses on promoting the enrolment of girl children in secondary schools and ensuring their retention up to 18 years of age.
- **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY):** helps improve access to quality healthcare services for women and girls.
- **One Stop Centre (OSC):** These centers provide integrated support services to women affected by violence.
- **Nirbhaya Fund:** This fund has been set up to support initiatives aimed at improving the safety of women.

Economic Empowerment of Women

- **Stand Up India Scheme:** Promotes entrepreneurship among women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority communities by providing them with bank loans.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):** Promotes access to basic banking services to women, thus promoting their financial inclusion.
- **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP):** Aims to provide skills that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs.
- **Mahila E-Haat:** An online marketing platform for women entrepreneurs.

Political Empowerment of Women

- **Training and Capacity Building Programs:** Various initiatives taken up by government and non-governmental organizations aim to equip women with skills and knowledge for effective political participation.
- **Women Leadership Development Programmes:** Government agencies like NIRD&PR (National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj) offer skill-building programs to women, focused on developing leadership and political participation.

Challenges to Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality and women empowerment in India is a complex challenge that involves socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Women empowerment is essential for achieving gender equality as some of the prominent hurdles coming its way are as follows:

Social Challenges Faced by Women

- **Discriminatory Social Norms:** Historical legacies mean that socio-cultural norms for men and women continue to remain discriminatory in many parts of India, especially in rural regions. While men are allowed to be “loud”, women are expected to be soft-spoken, calm, and quiet.
- **Role Stereotyping:** A large section of Indian society still considers that women are meant to stay limited to taking household chores. All the financial responsibilities and work outside are considered exclusive for males.
- **Low Literacy:** Traditional practices like dowry, and other factors mean that many families find it economically unviable to educate the girl child. Thus, the literacy rate of women in India, especially in rural areas, still remains poor.
- **Safety Concerns:** Women in India continue to be silent sufferers of gender-based violence such as female feticides, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, forced prostitution, honor killings, sexual harassment at the workplace, etc.

Economic Challenges Faced by Women

- **Lesser Employment Opportunities:** Gender role stereotyping attributed to women leads to prejudice and discrimination against women in the economic sphere. For example, women may be considered to be less reliable as workers because of their child-rearing and other household responsibilities.
- **Glass Ceiling:** The prevalence of the “**Glass Ceiling Effect**” means that women not only in India but across the globe face unsaid barriers, preventing them from reaching higher levels of professional success.
- **Economic Disparities:** Lesser work opportunities as well as access to finance mean that women in India suffer from economic disparity vis-a-vis men. This remains a major barrier to making them independent.

Political Challenges Faced by Women

- **Low Political Representation:** The representation of women in different legislative bodies, including the Parliament as well as State Legislative Assemblies, remains low across India.
- **‘Sarpanch-Pati’ Culture:** The prevalence of ‘sarpanch pati’ culture across India, wherein men relatives of elected women run the office in their place, means that even meager political representation of women is mostly nominal.

Other Challenges Faced by Women

- **Inadequate Implementation of Laws:** While strong legal frameworks exist for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in India, their effective implementation remains a challenge due to weak enforcement mechanisms and societal attitudes.
- **Emerging Challenges:** While Globalization and Urbanization have brought new opportunities to women, they have also exposed them to new vulnerabilities like trafficking and exploitation.

CONCLUSION

Achieving equality is an ongoing process, not a final state, requiring constant commitment and action to dismantle systemic discrimination and promote inclusive practices

Women's empowerment is crucial for building a just and prosperous society. It's not merely a matter of equal rights, but a catalyst for social and economic progress, driving positive change across all aspects of life. By investing in women's education, economic opportunities, and political participation, we unlock their potential and create a more inclusive and equitable world for everyone.

it is essential for creating a sustainable, just, and prosperous society, as it unlocks women's full potential, fosters gender equality, and drives economic and social progress for the entire community. Achieving this involves multifaceted strategies like ensuring equal access to education and economic opportunities, implementing supportive laws and policies, and transforming societal norms to create a future where women and men can thrive together. This increased participation can also lead to improved financial stability and independence, allowing women to achieve greater control over their personal and family lives. However, empowerment through paid work is not a costless process, given the various constraints that women must negotiate in order to engage in such work. **Women empowerment is not only crucial for achieving gender equality** but is also a catalyst for India's progress and development. **Women empowerment** helps boost women's **status** through literacy, education, training and awareness creation. Furthermore, **women's empowerment** refers to women's ...

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