

## **ADVANCING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract:**

India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has placed a renewed focus on social inclusion and human development. Gender equality and women's empowerment form the backbone of this effort, closely linked with improvements in health, education, and overall well-being. Despite legal and policy advancements, significant challenges remain in translating frameworks into tangible outcomes for marginalized women, particularly in rural, tribal, and socio-economically backward communities. This paper examines the interconnections between gender, health, and education through a rights-based approach, evaluates key government initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and POSHAN Abhiyaan, and identifies systemic gaps. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration, community participation, and accountability mechanisms for ensuring sustainable and inclusive development for all

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals, Gender equality, women's, empowerment, POSHAN Abhiyaan.

### **1. Introduction**

India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscores the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as foundational elements for achieving social inclusion and human development. Despite legal frameworks and policy initiatives, challenges persist in translating these commitments into tangible outcomes, particularly for marginalized women in rural, tribal, and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

### **2. Interconnection between Gender Equality, Health, and Education**

#### **2.1 Gender and Health**

Maternal health remains a critical concern. In 2023, India recorded approximately 19,000 maternal deaths, averaging 52 deaths daily. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) stood at 80 per 100,000 live births, marking an 11.1% decline from the previous year. However, these figures still fall short of the SDG target of reducing MMR to below 70 by 2030.

#### **2.2 Gender and Education**

The female literacy rate in India was reported at 74.6% for individuals aged 7 and above in 2025. While this indicates progress, significant gender disparities persist, especially in rural and tribal areas. The literacy rate among women aged 15-24 was higher at 96%, reflecting improvements in younger generations.

### **3. Key Government Initiatives**

#### **3.1 Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)**

Launched in 2015, the BBBP scheme aims to address gender imbalances and promote the education of girls. As of 2023-24, the national sex ratio at birth improved to 930 girls per 1,000

boys, up from 918 in 2014-15. A survey in Tamil Nadu indicated that 40.35% of respondents observed an improvement in literacy rates in their villages due to the scheme.

### **3.2 POSHAN Abhiyaan**

The National Nutrition Mission, POSHAN Abhiyaan, focuses on improving nutritional outcomes for women and children. As of November 2023, the program registered 10.01 crore beneficiaries, including lactating mothers, pregnant women, and children. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in achieving the desired nutritional outcomes.

## **4. Systemic Gaps and Challenges**

### **4.1 Inter-Sectoral Coordination**

Effective implementation of gender equality initiatives requires seamless coordination between various sectors, including health, education, and social welfare. Fragmented efforts often lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for holistic development.

### **4.2 Community Participation**

Engaging local communities, especially women, in the planning and execution of programs ensures that interventions are contextually relevant and more likely to succeed. Top-down approaches without grassroots involvement often face resistance and limited impact.

### **4.3 Monitoring and Accountability**

Robust mechanisms for monitoring and accountability are essential to track progress and address challenges promptly. The lack of real-time data and transparent reporting can hinder the effectiveness of gender-focused initiatives.

## **5. Policy Recommendations**

**Strengthen Inter-Sectoral Collaboration:** Establish integrated platforms for coordination among various government departments to ensure cohesive implementation of gender equality programs.

**Enhance Community Engagement:** Foster participatory approaches by involving women and local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that programs address their specific needs.

**Improve Monitoring Mechanisms:** Develop real-time data collection systems and transparent reporting frameworks to track the progress of gender equality initiatives effectively.

**Targeted Interventions for Marginalized Groups:** Design and implement programs that specifically address the challenges faced by women in rural, tribal, and socio-economically backward communities.

## **6. Conclusion**

Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment is pivotal for achieving social inclusion and human development in India. While significant strides have been made through initiatives like BBBP and POSHAN Abhiyaan, persistent challenges necessitate a renewed focus on inter-sectoral coordination, community participation, and robust monitoring mechanisms. By addressing these systemic gaps, India can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

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