

Empowering Women, Advancing Nations A Critical Analysis of Sustainable Development Goals and Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality. This paper critically examines India's progress toward women's empowerment in the context of SDGs, highlighting policy frameworks, institutional support, and socio-economic challenges. Despite significant strides in education, financial inclusion, and political representation, India faces deep-rooted structural barriers like low labour force participation, gender-based violence, and wage gaps. Through a review of recent data, case studies, and policy initiatives, this paper recommends inclusive strategies for mainstreaming gender in sustainable development

Keywords: Empowering Women, Advancing Nations: A Critical Analysis of Sustainable Development Goals and Women Empowerment in India.

1. Introduction

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marked a global commitment to gender equality as a prerequisite for inclusive development. India, as a signatory, has integrated SDG 5 into national policies and development planning. Women's empowerment in India is not only a goal but a catalyst for achieving other SDGs such as poverty eradication (SDG 1), quality education (SDG 4), and economic growth (SDG 8).

2. Conceptual Framework

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs comprise 17 interlinked goals that aim to eradicate poverty, promote equity, and protect the environment. SDG 5—**Gender Equality**—aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and ensure their full participation in public life.

Women Empowerment

Defined as increasing the capacity of women to make life choices, empowerment encompasses economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. It includes access to resources, decision-making power, and agency.

3. India's Performance on SDG 5

Gender Indicators

Global Gender Gap Index 2024: India ranked 135 out of 146.

Female Labour Force Participation: 31.7% in 2023–24. **Women in Parliament:** 15% in Lok Sabha (2024), with reservations proposed for 33%.

Sex Ratio at Birth: 929 females per 1,000 males (NITI Aayog, 2023).

4. Policy Measures

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

Mahila Shakti Kendra

Stand Up India and MUDRA Yojana

Gender Budgeting in the Union Budget since 2005–06

5. Key Challenges

Structural Barriers

Patriarchy and Social Norms: Deep-rooted discrimination restricts women's mobility, education, and employment.

Violence Against Women: High prevalence of domestic violence and low conviction rates.

Digital Divide: Limited access to digital tools and literacy among rural women.

6. Economic Disempowerment

Informal work dominates female employment (~90%).

Wage gap: Women earn ~70% of male wages.

Asset ownership (land, homes): Less than 14% of women are landowners.

7. The Role of Women in Achieving Other SDGs

SDG	Link to Women Empowerment
SDG 1 (No Poverty)	Economic self-reliance via entrepreneurship
SDG 3 (Good Health)	Reduced maternal mortality through access
SDG 4 (Education)	Increased girl enrolment and retention
SDG 13 (Climate Action)	Women's roles in sustainable farming, conservation

8. Recommendations

- Enhance Women's Workforce Participation**
Legal and policy reforms to support maternity benefits, flexible work, and safety.
- Invest in Digital Literacy**
Targeted programs to close the digital gender divide.
- Strengthen Gender Budgeting**
More granular data, local-level implementation, and monitoring.
- Scale SHGs and Women Collectives**
Link to sustainable enterprises and markets.
- Political Participation**
Implement the Women's Reservation Bill and build leadership pipelines.

9. Conclusion

While India has embraced the SDG framework and initiated numerous schemes to promote gender equality, transformational change requires addressing socio-economic norms and systemic inequalities. Empowered women are essential to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities. Achieving SDG 5 is not only a goal but a foundation for progress across the 2030 Agenda.

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