



Towards Sustainable Transition

Holistic Development and Inclusive
Transformation of Indian Society

Prof. Zeba Aqil | Dr. Khurshed Alam



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Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Dr. Vandana Mishra* & Dr. Pallavi**

The Socio-Economic Status of Women in India

The socio-economic status of women in India has evolved over the years, yet significant disparities continue to exist in areas such as education, employment, health, and political participation. Education plays a critical role in determining women's socio-economic mobility, with female literacy rates improving from 53.67% in 2001 to 70.3% by 2021 (Government of India, 2021). However, this progress is uneven, with rural women facing greater challenges in accessing education due to financial constraints, patriarchal norms, and infrastructural deficits (Agarwal, 2022). This educational disparity negatively impacts their participation in the workforce, which remains low. The Female Labor Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has seen a sharp decline, dropping to 19.23% in 2021, one of the lowest rates globally (World Bank, 2021). This can be attributed to factors such as unpaid domestic responsibilities, lack of formal job opportunities, and gender discrimination (Sinha&Verma, 2021). Most women are engaged in the informal economy, where they are paid less, lack social security, and have limited job security, which perpetuates economic dependence on male family members.(Molefe & Webster, 2001)

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Health is another significant indicator of the socio-economic status of women in India. Despite improvements in maternal mortality rates, which fell from 167 per 100,000 live births in 2011-13 to 97 in 2018-20 (Registrar General of India, 2020), access to healthcare remains unequal, especially for women from marginalized communities. Factors such as early marriages, inadequate healthcare access, and poor nutrition continue to affect women's health outcomes. Moreover, reproductive rights remain restricted, with high rates of adolescent pregnancies and limited access to safe abortions due to socio-cultural norms (Sisodiya & Bhargava, 2022).

Political participation is another area where women have made gains, particularly due to constitutional provisions like the 73rd and 74th Amendments, which reserve one-third of seats for women in local governance bodies. However, in higher political offices, women's representation remains low due to systemic barriers and gender biases (Kumar, 2021). Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and dowry-related harassment, further exacerbates the socio-economic vulnerabilities of women. Legal protections such as the Domestic Violence Act (2005) are often poorly enforced, leaving many women without adequate recourse (Desai, 2021).

In conclusion, while strides have been made in improving the socio-economic status of women in India, significant challenges remain. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies and cultural shifts to ensure women's full participation in economic, political, and social life.

Overview of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Commission supports national and regional strategies for the development of statistics in order to enhance the collection, processing, disaggregation, distribution, and analysis of high-quality statistics—both conventional and non-traditional—for the development of the suggested indicators for the monitoring and assessment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 targets. To enhance the capacity of national statistical organisations to meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda, the Commission suggests:

1. **No Poverty:** Abolish severe poverty for all people worldwide by 2030. severe poverty is currently defined as surviving on less than \$1.25 a day

2. **Zero Hunger:** Eliminate hunger and ensure that all people have continually availability of adequate supplies of nutritious food by 2030, with a special emphasis on the underprivileged and those in vulnerable situations, such as infants.
3. **Good Health and Well-being:** want to improve wellness outcomes and the standard of life worldwide by ensuring a healthy existence and promoting wellbeing for individuals of all ages.
4. **Quality Education:** Ensure sure that all people have equal chance of receiving thorough, just, and superior education. Promote lifelong learning opportunities that strengthen communities and individuals, promoting environmentally friendly growth and the creation of a more equitable society.
5. **Gender Equality:** In order to achieve gender parity and promote sustainable and equitable change worldwide, it is imperative that women and girls be granted equal rights and opportunities across all domains of life.
6. **Clean Water and Sanitation:** Make sure that everyone has access to sustainable management of water resources and sanitation facilities in order to promote human health and the sustainability of ecosystems. This will lessen water scarcity and promote hygiene.
7. **Affordable and Clean Energy** In this universal access to modern, affordable, sustainable, and dependable energy sources. To support social and economic advancement on a worldwide scale, promote efficiency and renewable energy technologies.
8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Facilitate equitable and fruitful employment opportunities for all individuals, fostering enduring, comprehensive, and sustainable economic expansion that will augment prosperity and well-being worldwide.
9. **Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure:** In this goal seeks to advance inclusive industrialization, develop innovation, and construct resilient infrastructure. Its main objectives are to build dependable, sustainable infrastructure; to encourage inclusive industrialization; to expand financial services accessibility; to upgrade infrastructure; and to advance scientific research. The objective is to raise governmental

and private investment on research and development as well as the ratio of researchers to every million inhabitants. In addition, the agenda seeks to expand access to ICT in the least developed nations by 2020 and encourages national technological innovation, research, and development in developing nations. (Youth & Camp, n.d.)

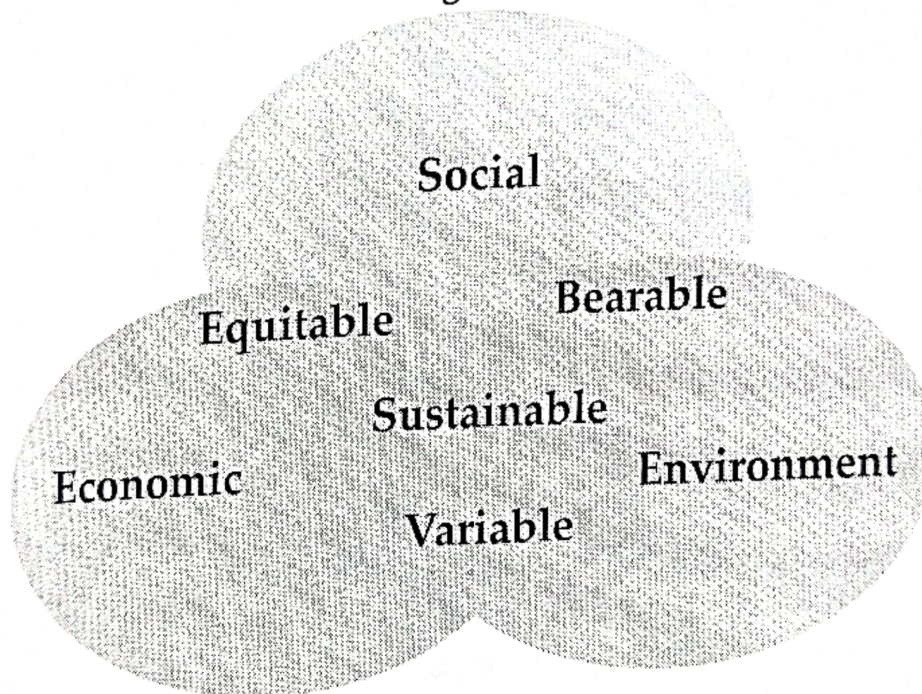
10. **Reduced Inequality:** Encourage social, economic, and political inclusion for everyone, with the goal of lowering inequality both within and between nations and guaranteeing that everyone has equal access to opportunities and outcomes.
11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Encourage the development of human settlements and cities that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable by making sure they are easily accessible to all, have enough housing and transportation, and have integrated planning and management.
12. **Responsible Consumption and Production:** Encourage environmentally friendly manufacturing and consumption practices to ensure resource efficiency, cut down on waste generation, and promote sustainable habits and lifestyles around the world.
13. **Climate Action:** Urgently combat climate change and its impacts by implementing measures to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate impacts, and fostering resilience in communities and ecosystems worldwide.
14. **Life Below Water:** By 2025, avoid and greatly decrease marine pollution, particularly that which results from activities on land such as the presence of ocean debris and nutrients from the environment.
15. **Life on Land:** To encourage the preservation, management, and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems, particularly forests, as well as sustainable land use and conservation. In addition to stopping desertification, you should protect biodiversity and stop land degradation.
16. **Peace, Justice, and Robust Institutions:** Create inclusive, accountable, and effective institutions at all governmental levels, and promote peaceful, inclusive societies for long-term growth..

17. **Partnerships for the Goals:** Enhance national asset engagement, particularly through foreign aid to developing countries, to enhance domestic capacity for tax and additional revenue collection.

Every objective has quantifiable objectives as well as indicators to monitor progress and guarantee inclusion. The SDGs are interconnected, addressing all basic aspects of sustainable development, essential for tackling poverty and inequality at their core and achieving lasting progress. (Alicia Bárcena, 2018)

The SDGs and the basic Pillars of Sustainable Development: Economic Growth, Social Inclusion, and Environmental Protection.

Figure 1



Source: <https://circularecology.com/sustainability-and-sustainable-development.html>

In this above image shown that Achieving sustainability involves achieving a balance among economic, environmental, and social factors, which are widely recognized as essential components of sustainability.

Defining a cohesive set of SDGs presents challenges, particularly due to potential conflicts between goals like energy provision and climate change mitigation. However, our approach demonstrates feasibility by integrating MDGs with scientifically informed global environmental targets and existing international agreements, proposing six SDGs with provisional 2030 targets. (Nations & Griggs, 2015)

The Essence of Female Autonomy and Equal opportunities for women

The advancement of civilization depends on women's empowerment and the promotion of gender parity. But according to the Beijing Platform evaluation from 2015, none of the nations has completely achieved these goals. Agenda 2030 has a strong emphasis on strengthening women and advocating gender parity with many SDGs incorporating gender perspectives into a range of aims. (Sen & Mukherjee, 2014), such as sustainable cities (Goal 11), employment (Goal 8), water and sanitation (Goal 6), nutrition (Goal 2), poverty (Goal 1), and education (Goal 4). (Kaltenborn, n.d.)

Women's empowerment involves enabling women to independently steer their lives, make choices, and have equitable access to opportunities and resources. It aims to create an environment where women can participate in society and the economy on par with men, with their rights respected and voices heard. This empowerment spans social, political, economic, and educational dimensions, ultimately striving for a society where women can pursue their aspirations freely, devoid of gender-based biases or constraints.

It is stated in the 2014 UN Global Survey report on the "Role of Women in Development" that there are proven links between the sustainability of the environment, society, and economy and the empowerment of women. Public monies are allocated to investments in human development objectives, including employment, social protection, health, and nutrition, is made easier when women actively participate in decision-making. It is incorrect to view empowerment as a zero-sum game in which the success of women inherently means the failure of men. As per the 2014 UN World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, there is a proven correlation between the empowerment of women and the sustainability of the environment, society, and economy. When women actively engage in decision-making, it is easier to allocate public monies to investments in human development goals including employment, social protection, health, and nutrition, (Survey et al., 2014)

The Concept of Gender and Gender Equality

The gender refers to the circumstances of society and differences among men and women. This makes reference to the roles that society and culture assign to men and women. Gender roles are

learned through conduct. Gender does not mean sex, which is a phrase used to describe biological differences between both genders. Age, class, race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as the political, economic, and geographic context, all have an impact on gender roles. (Blackstone, 2017)

Gender and the Construction of Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women. Unlike sex, which refers to biological differences, gender is shaped by cultural, social, and political factors. The construction of gender is a dynamic process influenced by various societal institutions like family, education, media, and religion, as well as broader socio-economic and political systems.

1. The Social Construction of Gender

Sociologists argue that gender is not an innate characteristic but a socially constructed phenomenon. Judith Lorber (1994) defines gender as a social institution that organizes daily life, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. From early childhood, boys and girls are socialized into gender roles through practices that assign different expectations to them. These roles are perpetuated by societal institutions, thereby reinforcing a binary understanding of gender.

2. Institutions in the Construction of Gender

- **Family:** Families play a crucial role in the construction of gender by socializing children into traditional gender roles. In most societies, boys are encouraged to be assertive and independent, while girls are taught to be nurturing and caring. Raewyn Connell (2002) discusses how "hegemonic masculinity" emerges in families, where boys are expected to embody dominant masculine traits, reinforcing gender inequalities.
- **Education:** Schools are another critical site for gender socialization. Teachers may unconsciously reinforce gender stereotypes by encouraging boys to excel in subjects like math and science while expecting girls to focus on arts and literature (Sadker & Zittleman, 2013). Gendered curricula and interactions with peers further perpetuate these expectations.
- **Media:** The media plays a powerful role in reinforcing gender norms by depicting men and women in stereotypical roles.

Women are often portrayed as emotional and dependent, while men are shown as strong and rational (Butler, 1990). These representations shape societal perceptions of appropriate behavior for each gender.

- **Religion:** Religious institutions have historically reinforced gender roles by promoting patriarchal structures that assign different moral and ethical expectations to men and women. Rosemary Ruether (1993) argues that many religious traditions prescribe submissive roles for women, particularly within the family structure.

Feminist views on Gender Equality and women's Empowerment

Feminist theorists have critically examined the construction of gender, challenging traditional views of gender as biologically determined. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) argued that society imposes limitations on women through cultural norms, creating the notion of women as the "Other." Judith Butler (1990) introduced the concept of "gender performativity," arguing that gender is not an innate identity but a series of repetitive actions that align with societal expectations. Nancy Chodorow's (1978) psychoanalytic work highlighted how family structures, particularly women's caregiving roles, shape gender identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced "intersectionality," emphasizing that gender cannot be understood in isolation from race, class, and other social categories, making the experiences of women, especially women of color, more nuanced. These theorists offer key insights into how gender is socially constructed and maintained.

Gender Equality

The equal assessment, evaluation, and promotion of the unique needs and behaviours of men and women is referred to as gender equality. It signifies that an individual's prospects, rights, and duties are independent of their gender at birth, rather than suggesting that men and women must become the same. In this there to be equal right in society must benefit from significant possibilities, resources, benefits, and industrial products on an equal basis. When it comes to decision-making and social and economic resources, women are often marginalised or subjected to discriminatory treatment in instances of gender inequality. (Pathania, 2017)

Gender Role

The expectations that people have of Gender roles are influenced by beliefs and gender conventions in each community, as well as by how people treat one another based on their sex. These roles, which serve as markers of the behaviours deemed appropriate for each sex, are the outcome of interactions between individuals and their environment. What is deemed appropriate gender behaviour depends on a society's views on gender differences? Understanding the difference between "gender" and "sex" is crucial to comprehending "gender roles." Gender is a social construct that encompasses the meanings, values, and traits associated with various sexes, whereas "sex" is a biological term based on fundamental sex characteristics.(Blackstone, 2017)

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Independent Goals

Women gain control when they go through a process of changing both personally and socially so they may become powerful, make important decisions, and take charge of their own life. There are diverse pathways towards achieving women's empowerment, with key facilitating factors including collective action among women, legal and constitutional reforms, policies, both societal and monetary, as well as changes in social and cultural expectations. It emphasizes that empowerment cannot be imposed upon women; instead, women themselves are the primary agents driving their own empowerment. To advance women's empowerment globally, it is essential for the international community to support women and their allies in challenging and transforming existing gender and power dynamics.(Neil et al., 2014)

Key Components of Women empowerment in the context of Sustainable Development

Economic Development: Involvement equality in society to encourage faster rates of economic growth, higher levels of productivity, including a decline in poverty. Half population participation in the workforce and leadership roles enhances innovation and economic resilience. **Increased Labor Force Participation:** Integrating women into the workforce enhances overall economic productivity and growth. Research indicates that bridging the gender employment gap could substantially

elevate GDP across numerous nations. For example, According to the Global Institute of McKinsey, by 2025, expanding gender equality might boost the world economy by a staggering \$12 trillion. (Summary, 2015) **Education as a Catalyst:** Investing in girls' education significantly influences economic development. Enhanced educational attainment among women correlates with higher income, better health outcomes, and greater productivity. As per the World Bank, girls who receive an extra year of education can increase their incomes by 10-20% in the future. **Health as Economic Capital:** Women's health is a crucial aspect of economic development. Investments in healthcare, including reproductive health, lead to lower mortality rates, improved health status, and greater workforce participation. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that healthier women contribute more effectively to the economy. **Policy Interventions:** Governments play a vital role in promoting women's equality through policies that ensure equal pay, parental leave, and anti-discrimination laws. The Nordic countries, for example, have implemented comprehensive gender equality policies, resulting in high female labor force participation and strong economic performance. **Property and Inheritance Rights:** Legal frameworks that grant women equal property and inheritance rights are essential for economic empowerment. These rights enable women to access capital, start businesses, and invest in their futures. **Challenging Stereotypes:** Shifting societal attitudes towards gender roles is crucial for achieving women's equality. Programs that promote gender sensitivity and challenge stereotypes can create more inclusive environments, enabling women to contribute fully to economic activities. **Community Engagement:** Community organisations and grassroots initiatives are essential in promoting feminine socioeconomic rights as well as possibilities. Engaging men and boys in these efforts is also important to foster a supportive environment for gender equality. Social development and women empowerment are deeply interconnected, where progress in one can significantly impact the other. Here's an exploration of key areas where they overlap, supported by references:

1. Education and Literacy

- **Impact on Social Mobility:** Education empowers women by enhancing their social mobility and economic prospects. For instance, Women with greater levels of education are more likely to work and make more money. This in turn can lead to better health and educational outcomes for their children (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative - 2014, 2014).
- **Global Progress:** The World Bank estimates that reducing the gender gap in schooling can result in a 3% rise in GDP per person. (World Bank, 2018).

2. Health and Well-being

- **Reproductive Health:** Access to reproductive health services empowers women by giving them control over their bodies and fertility. This is crucial for their physical and mental well-being and can significantly impact their ability to participate in social and economic activities (WHO, 2017).
- **Maternal Health:** Improved maternal health services reduce maternal mortality and enhance women's ability to contribute to social and economic development (UNICEF, 2019).

3. Economic Participation

- **Labour Market Inclusion:** Women's economic empowerment through participation in the labor market contributes to social development by reducing poverty and increasing economic stability. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), Reducing the gender disparity in labour force participation might result in a 3.9% rise in the world GDP. (ILO, 2018).
- **Entrepreneurship:** Supporting women entrepreneurs not only drives economic growth but also fosters social innovation and community development (IFC, 2019).

4. Political Participation

- **Representation and Decision-Making:** Women's participation in political processes ensures that their voices are heard in policy-making, leading to more inclusive and equitable social development. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that women's representation in national parliaments has increased, promoting gender-sensitive legislation (IPU, 2020).

- **Leadership Roles:** Empowering women to take on leadership roles can transform societal norms and contribute to a more equitable distribution of power and resources (UN Women, 2018).
5. **Legal and Human Rights**
- **Legal Reforms:** laws that advance gender equality and safeguard women's rights are essential for social development. These include laws against gender-based violence, equal inheritance rights, and anti-discrimination policies (UNDP, 2016).
 - **Human Rights:** The advancement and protection of female's human rights stimulates them and advances societal equitable development. (Amnesty International, 2017).
6. **Social and Cultural Norms**
- **Challenging Stereotypes:** Advancing social development involves challenging and transforming cultural norms and stereotypes that restrict women's roles and opportunities. This effort encompasses fostering gender equality in education, media, and community practices. (UNESCO, 2017).
 - **Community Engagement:** Engaging communities in dialogues about gender equality can transform attitudes and behaviours, leading to greater empowerment for women and girls (UNICEF, 2018).

Conclusion

Equal development display the crucial role in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which effectively touch on every area of sustainable development. Achieving gender equality, or Sustainable Development Goal No. 5, is crucial to accomplishing all other goals because it addresses the systemic barriers that keep women from participating fully in social, economic, and political life. Initiatives for sustainable development must place a high priority on strengthening women and guaranteeing they have fair opportunities for medical care, educational opportunities, decent work, and participation in financial and political decision-making. (Gamez & Angeles, 2020) Gender equality contributes to poverty reduction (SDG 1), encourages optimal health and well-being (SDG 3) and raises the standard of education (SDG 4). In addition, it promotes peace, justice, and robust institutions in addition to aiding in economic progress (SDG 8). (SDG 16). Furthermore, women's empowerment leads

to more resilient and sustainable communities by promoting inclusive and equitable economic growth, lowering inequality (SDG 10) and guaranteeing patterns of sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12). The gender disparities in tackling climate change (SDG 13), access to safe water and sanitation (SDG 6), and community development that is sustainable (SDG 11) demonstrate the connection between gender equality and broader sustainability activities.

In conclusion, advancing gender equality and empowering women are not only moral imperatives but also practical necessities for achieving the SDGs. By prioritizing these goals, Society may realise the potential of every person, resulting in a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable world for everybody. (Lambert & Orkaido, 2023)

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