

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Viksit Bharat@2047

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ABSTRACT:

Gender equality and women empowerment are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reflected directly in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) and indirectly across other goals. Ensuring equal opportunities for women in education, employment, politics, and decision-making not only enhances social justice but also contributes to inclusive economic growth and environmental sustainability. This article explores the significance of gender equality in achieving SDGs, identifies the challenges faced by women globally, and highlights strategies, policies, and best practices that can accelerate progress. It concludes that gender equality is not simply a moral imperative but also an economic and social necessity for sustainable development.

KEYWORDS:

Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, SDG 5, Sustainable Development Goals, Inclusive Growth, Human Rights

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Introduction

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, sets out 17 goals and 169 targets to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Among these, SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls is both a stand-alone goal and a cross-cutting enabler for the success of all other goals. Globally, women constitute almost half of the population, yet their contributions remain undervalued and underutilized. Persistent inequalities in access to resources, education, healthcare, political power, and technology create barriers to women's participation in decision-making processes. Without addressing these inequalities, achieving the broader SDGs will remain unattainable.

Women empowerment goes beyond providing equal opportunities—it includes equipping women with skills, resources, and confidence to participate fully in economic, social, and political life. It also means dismantling systemic barriers such as discrimination, gender-based violence, and cultural stereotypes. Thus, gender equality is not just a human rights issue but a driver of economic development, social progress, and environmental sustainability.

Importance of Gender Equality in SDGs

Gender equality is deeply linked with multiple Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 1 (No Poverty): Empowered women improve household income and break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger): Women farmers, if given equal access to resources, can significantly increase agricultural productivity.

SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being): Women's empowerment reduces maternal and child mortality, enhances healthcare access, and promotes healthier families.

SDG 4 (Quality Education): Educating girls leads to higher literacy rates, reduced child marriages, and better social outcomes.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Closing the gender labor gap could add trillions to global GDP.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Equal opportunities reduce social and economic disparities.

SDG 13 (Climate Action): Women, particularly in rural areas, are key to community resilience and sustainable resource use.

Thus, gender equality functions as a multiplier effect, driving progress across all other SDGs.

Current Challenges

Despite global recognition, progress remains uneven and slow:

1. Educational Disparities

Around 129 million girls worldwide remain out of school (UNESCO, 2023).

Barriers include poverty, early marriage, lack of sanitation facilities, and cultural biases.

2. Economic Inequalities

Women earn about 20% less than men globally for the same work. Many are confined to informal labor markets with little job security or social protection.

3. Political Underrepresentation

Women occupy only 26.5% of national parliament seats worldwide. Leadership roles in corporate and policy-making sectors remain male-dominated.

4. Gender-based Violence

One in three women experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Violence reduces women's participation in education, work, and public life.

5. Cultural and Social Barriers

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms restrict women's mobility, decision-making, and independence.

6. Digital Divide

Women are 17% less likely than men to use the internet, restricting access to information, e-commerce, and digital skills.

Strategies to Empower Women and Achieve SDGs

To overcome these challenges, multi-dimensional strategies are necessary:

1. Policy and Legal Reforms

Enforce equal pay policies, anti-discrimination laws, and gender-sensitive legislation.

Strengthen measures against gender-based violence.

2. Education and Skill Development

Increase investments in girls' education and vocational training.

Promote women's participation in STEM fields to prepare them for future economies.

3. Economic Empowerment

Provide microfinance, access to credit, and entrepreneurship programs.

Encourage women's cooperatives and self-help groups to boost

collective empowerment.

4. Political Participation

Implement gender quotas in parliaments and local governance. Offer leadership training programs to build confidence and capacity.

5. Technology Inclusion

Promote affordable access to the internet and digital tools. Expand digital literacy programs for rural and marginalized women.

6. Awareness and Cultural Change

Run campaigns to challenge stereotypes, promote shared household responsibilities, and encourage male allies in gender equality.

Case Studies

Rwanda: Women hold more than 60% of parliamentary seats, influencing progressive laws on healthcare, education, and social welfare.

India: Self-Help Groups (SHGs) empower millions of rural women economically, while government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao promote girls' education.

Nordic Countries: Strong welfare systems and gender-friendly policies ensure higher women's workforce participation and leadership.

Bangladesh: Women-led microfinance institutions, such as Grameen Bank, have improved financial inclusion and poverty reduction.

Recommendations

1. Governments must prioritize gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources fairly.
2. Private sector should embrace corporate gender equality policies, ensuring diversity in leadership.
3. Education systems must integrate gender-sensitive curricula to change perceptions from an early age.
4. International organizations should strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms for SDG
5. Partnerships between governments, NGOs, and communities are vital to accelerate women empowerment.

Future Outlook

If current gender disparities are not addressed, the world risks

missing the 2030 SDG targets. However, investing in women yields enormous returns—economically, socially, and environmentally. By 2030, achieving gender equality could add \$12 trillion to the global economy (McKinsey, 2022). More importantly, empowered women will play a central role in tackling climate change, digital transformation, and global peace building efforts.

Conclusion

Gender equality and women empowerment are both moral imperatives and practical necessities for sustainable development. The achievement of SDG 5 is essential to unlocking progress across all other SDGs. Women's active participation in education, economy, politics, and technology ensures more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies. For the 2030 Agenda to succeed, governments, businesses, and civil society must recognize that empowering women is empowering humanity itself.

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