

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

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Abstract

The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. This paper deals with importance of gender equality towards achieving the goal of women empowerment. It outlines the gender inequality scenario in India and types of inequalities between men and women. This paper sheds light on importance of gender equality and role of gender equality in women empowerment, gender concern in development and gender mainstreaming in development. This paper concludes with some interesting findings along with policy suggestions.

Introduction

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life.

Gender Inequality in India

An analysis of gender equality is very essential to understand the level of women empowerment in Indian society. According to Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000), gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. As per the report by Tisdell, Roy and Ghose (2001), various international gender inequality indices rank India differently on each of these factors, as well as on a composite basis, and these indices are controversial. Gender inequalities, and its social causes, impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment, and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike. Some argue that some gender equality measures, place men at a disadvantage. However, when India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantage in several important ways.

Table 1: Gender inequality scenario in India and world

Gender Statistic Measure	Females (India)	Males (India)	Females (World)	Males (World)
Withdrawals in a typical month, (per cent with an account, age 15+)	18.6	12.7	15.5	12.8
Unemployment, youth (per cent of labor force ages 15-24, ILO method)	10.6	9.4	15.1	13.0
Unemployment, (per cent of labor force, ILO method)	4	3.1		
Self-employed, (per cent employed)	85.5	80.6		
Secondary school education, pupils (per cent)	46	54	47.6	52.4
Secondary school education, gender of teachers (per cent)	41.1	58.9	51.9	48.1
Ratio to males in primary and secondary education (per cent)	0.98	1.0	0.97	1.0
Ratio to male youth unemployment rate (per cent ages 15-24, ILO method)	1.13	1.0	1.14	1.0
Primary school completion rate, (per cent)	96.6	96.3		
Outstanding loan from banks to purchase a home, (per cent age 15+)	2.26	2.35	6.6	7.4
Outstanding loan from banks for health or emergencies, (per cent age 15+)	12.6	15.7	10.3	11.6
Lower secondary school completion rate, (per cent)	76.0	77.9	70.2	70.5
Loan from a financial institution in the past	6.7	8.6	8.1	10.0

year, (per cent age 15+)				
Life expectancy at birth, (years)	68	64.5	72.9	68.7
Life expectancy at age 60, (years)	18.0	15.9		
Infant mortality rate, (per 1,000 live births)	44.3	43.5	32.6	37
Expected years of schooling	11.3	11.8	11.7	12.0
Employees in industry, (per cent of total labor)	20.7	26		
Employees in agriculture, (per cent of total labor)	59.8	43		
Deposits in a typical month, (per cent with an account, age 15+)	11.2	13.4	13.0	12.8
Cause of death, by non-communicable diseases, ages 15-34, (per cent)	32.3	33.0	29.5	27.5
Account at a formal financial institution, (per cent of each gender, age 15+)	26.5	43.7	46.6	54.5

Source : The World Bank's Gender Statistics database for 2012

It is observed from the data in table 1 that in India females have more numbers than the males in agriculture employment, infant mortality life expectancy at birth primary school completion rate, ratio to male unemployment rate in terms of ages between 15-24 years, self-employed level, unemployed level and unemployed youth. In India the males have more numbers than females with respect to completion of secondary school education, secondary school male teachers, ratio of males in primary and secondary education, outstanding loans from banks to purchase a home, outstanding loan from bank for health care, lower secondary school completion rate, loan from a financial institution in the past year, expected years of schooling, employees in industry, deposits in a typical month, causes of death, by non-communicable diseases, and account at a formal financial institution. It could be noted that women status at the world level has better position than the status of women in India.

Gender inequality in Agriculture

As per the report by Rao, E. Krishna (2006), over 50 per cent of Indian labor is employed in agriculture. A majority of rural men work as cultivators, while a majority of women work in livestock maintenance, egg and milk production. It could be noted that about 78 per cent of rural women are engaged in agriculture, compared to 63 per cent men. About 37 per cent of women are cultivators, but they are more active in the irrigation, weeding, winnowing, transplanting and harvesting stages of agriculture. About 70 per cent of farm work was performed by women in India in 2004. Women's labor participation rate is about 47 per cent in India's tea plantations, 46 per cent in cotton cultivation, 45 per cent growing oil seeds and 39 per cent in horticulture.

There is wage inequality between men and women in India. The largest wage gap was in manual ploughing operations in 2009, where men were paid Rs. 103 per day, while women were paid Rs.55, a wage gap ratio of 1.87. For sowing the wage gap ratio reduced to 1.38 and for weeding 1.18. For other agriculture operations such as winnowing, threshing and transplanting, the men to female wage ratio varied from 1.16 to 1.28. For sweeping, the 2009 wages were statistically same for men and women in all states of India.

Occupational inequalities

Women are not allowed to have combat roles in the armed forces. According to a study carried out on this issue, a recommendation was made that female officers be excluded from induction in close combat arms, where chances of physical contact with the enemy are high. It is reported that a permanent commission could not be granted to female officers since they have neither been trained for command nor have they been given the responsibility so far. It shows persistence of disempowerment of women in holding certain occupations in India.

Property Rights

Women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, but in practice, women are at a disadvantage. This is evidenced in the fact that 70 per cent of rural land is owned by men. Laws, such as the Married Women Property Rights Act of 1974 protect women, but few seek legal redress. Although the Hindu Succession Act of 2005 provides equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, the law is weakly enforced, especially in Northern India. The denial property rights hinder the economic empowerment of women.

Education Inequalities

India is on target to meet its Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education by 2015. UNICEF's measure of attendance rate and Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) capture the quality of education. Despite some gains, India needs to triple its rate of improvement to reach GEEI score of 95 per cent by 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals. In rural India girls continue to be less educated than the boys. It shows that denial of educational empowerment of girls in India.

Literacy

As per the report by Kalyani Menon-Sen, A. K. Shiva Kumar (2001), the female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. According to Census of India

2011, literacy rate of females is 65.46 per cent compared to a male which is 82.14 per cent. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. According to Kingdon, Geeta Gandhi (2007), the major factor behind the improved social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy. From 2006-2010, the percent of females who completed at least a secondary education was almost half that of men, 26.6 per cent compared to 50.4 per cent. In the current generation of youth, the gap seems to be closing at the primary level and increasing in the secondary level. In rural Punjab, the gap between girls and boys in school enrolment increases dramatically with age as demonstrated in National Family Health Survey-3 where girls age 15-17 in Punjab are 10 per cent more likely than boys to drop out of school. Although this gap has been reduced significantly, problems still remain in the quality of education for girls where boys in the same family will be sent to higher quality private schools and girls sent to the government school in the village.

Reservations for female students

Under Non-Formal Education programme, about 40 per cent of the centres in states and 10 per cent of the centres in UTs are exclusively reserved for females. As of 2000, about 0.3 million NFE centres were catering to about 7.42 million children, out of which about 0.12 million were exclusively for girls. Certain state level engineering, medical and other colleges like in Orissa have reserved 30 per cent of their seats for females. [G:\ \Typing.htm - cite note-menwithout-30](#) The Prime Minister of India and the Planning Commission also vetoed a proposal to set up an Indian Institute of Technology exclusively for females. Although India had witnessed substantial improvements in female literacy and enrolment rate since the 1990s, the quality of education for female remains to be heavily compromised as the country continues to hold greater value for male than female. Even today the government of India is unable to implement the 33 per cent of reservation to women, indicating male dominance in India.

Health and survival inequalities

On health and survival measures, international standards consider the birth sex ratio implied sex-selective abortion, and gender inequality between women's and men's life expectancy and relative number of years that women live compared to men in good health by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors.

Gender-based violence

As per the report by Crime in India (2012), average annual crime rates per 100,000 women in India by its States and Union Territories. Crime rate in this map includes all

Indian Penal Code crimes such as rape, sexual assault, insult to modesty, kidnapping, abduction, cruelty by intimate partner or relatives, importation or trafficking of girls, persecution for dowry, dowry deaths, indecency, and all other crimes identified by Indian law.

Domestic violence, rape and dowry-related violence are sources of gender violence. According to the National Crime Records Bureau 2013 annual report, 24,923 rape cases were reported across India in 2012. [G:\ \Typing.htm - cite note-ncrb13-49](#) Out of these, 24,470 were committed by relative or neighbor; in other words, the victim knew the alleged rapist in 98 per cent of the cases. [G:\ \Typing.htm - cite note-The Hindu-50](#)

Political inequalities

This measure of gender inequality considers the gap between men and women in political decision making at the highest levels. On this measure, India has ranked in top 20 countries worldwide for many years, with 9th best in 2013 - a score reflecting less gender inequality in India's political empowerment than Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, France and United Kingdom. From the prime minister to chief ministers of various states, Indian voters have elected women to its state legislative assemblies and national parliament in large numbers for many decades.

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63 per cent, compared to 67.09 per cent turnout for men. In 16 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in April-May 2014 elections for India's parliament. India passed 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993, which provides for 33 per cent quotas for women's representation in the local self-government institutions. These amendments were implemented in 1993.

Importance of Gender Equality

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home.

Within the context of population and development programmes, gender equality is critical because it will enable women and men to make decisions that impact more positively on their own sexual and reproductive health as well as that of their spouses

and families. Decision-making with regard to such issues as age at marriage, timing of births, use of contraception and recourse to harmful practices female genital cutting stands to be improved with the achievement of gender equality.

However it is important to acknowledge that where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. This would enable them to make decisions and take actions to achieve and maintain their own reproductive and sexual health. Gender equality and women's empowerment do not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex.

The achievement of gender equality implies changes for both men and women. More equitable relationships will need to be based on a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres of life, including the family, the workplace and the society at large. It is therefore crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is, indeed, often overlooked, because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norm, and those of women as a variation of the norm.

But the lives of men are just as strongly influenced by gender as those of women. Societal norms and practices about "masculinity" and expectations of men as leaders, husbands or sons create demands on men and shape their behaviour. Men are too often expected to concentrate on the material needs of their families, rather than on the nurturing and caring roles assigned to women. Socialization in the family and later in schools promotes risk-taking behaviour among young men, and this is often reinforced through peer pressure and media stereotypes. So the lifestyles that men's roles demand often result in their being more exposed to greater risks of morbidity and mortality than women. These risks include ones relating to accidents, violence and alcohol consumption.

Men also have the right to assume a more nurturing role, and opportunities for them to do so should be promoted. Equally, however, men have responsibilities in regard to child health and to their own and their partners' sexual and reproductive health. Addressing these rights and responsibilities entails recognizing men's specific health problems, as well as their needs and the conditions that shape them. The adoption of a gender perspective is an important first step; it reveals that there are disadvantages and costs to men accruing from patterns of gender difference. It also underscores that gender equality is concerned not only with the roles, responsibilities and needs of women and men, but also with the interrelationships between them.

Empowering Women

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access

than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. The gender equality is need of the hour to prevent the violence against women.

The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Where women's status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. Population and development and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined they are socially determined, changing and changeable. Although they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and change over time.

Key issues and linkages

Reproductive health: Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a major – but preventable cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.

Stewardship of Natural Resources

Women in India are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.

Economic Empowerment

In India more women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere.

Educational Empowerment

About two thirds of the illiterate adults in India are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

Political Empowerment

Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women.

Gender Equality in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Convention defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Such situation leads to women empowerment.

By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including: to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women; to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life including the right to vote and to stand for election as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children. States parties also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

Gender Concern in Development

Taking gender concerns into account when designing and implementing population and development programmes therefore is important for two reasons. First, there are differences between the roles of men and women, differences that demand different approaches. Second, there is systemic inequality between men and women. Universally, there are clear patterns of women's inferior access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, women are systematically under-represented in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. This pattern of inequality is a constraint to the progress of any society because it limits the opportunities of one-half of its population. When women are constrained from reaching their full potential, that potential is lost to society as a whole. Programme design and implementation should endeavour to address either or both of these factors.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender concerns in the analysis, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself; a process, not a goal. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in population and development activities. This requires addressing both the condition, as well as the position, of women and men in society. Gender mainstreaming therefore aims to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labour between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making.

Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, does not preclude interventions that focus only on women or only on men. In some instances, the gender analysis that precedes programme design and development reveals severe inequalities that call for an initial strategy of sex-specific interventions. However, such sex-specific interventions should still aim to reduce identified gender disparities by focusing on equality or inequity as the objective rather than on men or women as a target group. In such a context, sex-specific interventions are still important aspects of a gender mainstreaming strategy. When implemented correctly, they should not contribute to a marginalization of men in such a critical area as access to reproductive and sexual health services. Nor should they contribute to the evaporation of gains or advances already secured by women. Rather, they should consolidate such gains that are central building blocks towards gender equality.

Critical Appraisal

Despite major progress, gender inequality persists in many societies and violence against women and girls remains widespread. The lack of access to secondary education and to sexual and reproductive health services for girls and women is a key driver of gender inequality. In addition, discrimination against ethnic minority groups, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and geographically-isolated populations is widespread throughout the world. Gender inequality and other forms of discrimination violate the universal standards of justice enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements. Societies that discriminate against women and social groups obstruct the economic potential of large shares of their populations, which lowers economic growth and limits poverty reduction. Pervasive discrimination and high levels of inequality are also associated with higher risks of conflict and violence.

In response, India has successfully instituted legal and administrative reforms to reduce inequality and realize the human rights of all members of society, with a specific view towards reducing disparities by gender and other status. In some cases, practices that are inconsistent with sustainable development and the realization of human rights, such as child marriage, child labor, and sexual violence, need to be tackled head on. Some countries have also actively promoted social support for children in poor households as a way to ensure that poverty is not “vertically transmitted” from poor parents to their children. Ensuring registration at birth has also proven successful in enhancing equal opportunities and legal rights.

Societies and political systems differ in their responses to inequality. Some resist it strongly through aggressive policies and transfers; others seem to tolerate very high levels of inequality. We call on all societies to ensure that all individuals and households are empowered to fully participate in political, economic, and social life. To ensure sustainable development, economic gains must not only be inclusive, but the quality of social interactions that are based on trust, honesty, voluntarism, and solidarity needs to be enhanced through the promotion of social ethics and the observance of human rights for all.

An ambitious objective should be that every country halve “relative poverty,” defined as the percentage of households in a country that earn less than half the median household income in that country. Relative poverty leaves households out of the mainstream of social life, facing discrimination, lack of access to skills and decent work, and a loss of dignity. It also adds to personal stress and can reduce life expectancy and health more generally.

Pathways towards addressing inequalities, overcoming discrimination, and improving social capital are complex and uncertain. Yet there is strong evidence that policies and investments targeted towards social inclusion can play an important role in lowering inequalities and promoting equal opportunities for all. Means to reduce inequalities include greater respect for the rule of law; equal access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure services through adequate public financing; effective legal and administrative reforms including laws on ownership and inheritance of land, and measures to combat corruption; promoting human rights and combating discrimination; affirmative action programs for the poor and marginalized; and social safety nets to better manage the risk of sickness and the consequences of aging.

A central focus of the post-2015 agenda must be on providing universal access to high-quality public services and infrastructure. To achieve universal access, we call on countries to collect data on access and utilization that is disaggregated by gender and major social, economic, or other dimensions, so that inequalities in access can be detected and addressed through policy and public awareness.

The most important public good is peace and security, including personal security. Conflict especially is a mortal threat to development, and development cannot thrive without safety from personal and psychological violence, which are all too often directed against women and girls. Even in peaceful countries, interpersonal, criminal, and gang-related armed violence can be a barrier to development. Governments should prevent armed violence, e.g. by disarming ex-combatants and civilians, strengthening the security sector and police, ensuring access to justice, and by working with civil society organizations to end pervasive violence, especially against women and girls. Children must also have special protection from the impact of armed conflict, including the use of child soldiers, and from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Personal security, ending conflict, and consolidating peace are all essential components of good governance for sustainable development.

Conclusion

It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment. It is observed that women in India have been subjected to various types of discrimination and disabilities towards enjoyment of benefits of development consequent upon disempowerment. Hence the empowerment of women could be possible through attainment of gender equality. In order to promote gender equality in socio economic development, the following measures can be considered.

Suggestion

- Expansion of women's participation in policy decision-making processes
- Reconsideration of social systems and practices and raise awareness from a gender equal perspective
- Promotion of understanding of the significance of gender equality for men
- Promotion of understanding of gender equality from childhood
- Securing equal opportunities and treatment between men and women in employment
- Promotion of equal and balanced treatment aimed at equal wage for work of equal value
- Promotion of gender equality aimed at bringing about vibrant agricultural, forestry, and fisheries communities
- Promotion of prevention of spousal violence and protection for victims
- Comprehensive policy development for women's lifelong health
- Health support that corresponds to gender difference
- Enhancement of education and learning to promote gender equality and facilitate diversity of choice
- Gender equality in science and technology and academic fields
- Promotion of gender equality in the area of regional development, disaster prevention, environment, and others
- Expansion of Women's Participation in Policy and Decision-making Processes in All Fields in Society
- Prohibition of gender discrimination during all stages of employment and management
- Promotion of Measures to Secure Equal Opportunities and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment
- Improvement of Women's Education and Learning Activities to Achieve
- Women's Empowerment

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