

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development Goals - A Study

Srinivasa C¹, Dr. Kundan Basavaraj²

¹ Department of Postgraduate Studies and Research in Commerce Kuvempu University,
JnanaSahyadri, Shankaraghatta,

² Professor Department of Commerce, Sahyadri Commerce and Management College,
Shivamogga,

srinivasacsris7@gmail.com

Abstract

The term "women empowerment" was first introduced at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in 1985, and it has gained significant traction since then. Gender equality has been designated as the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). While India has made strides in prioritizing gender equality and women empowerment, the current socio-economic and political landscape highlights the persistent secondary status of women within the country's patriarchal framework. This research paper critically examines India's global ranking in terms of gender equality and assesses the efforts made toward achieving SDG-5. Utilizing secondary data from credible sources such as government reports, academic journals, and reputable websites, the study finds that India ranks lower than many other developing nations in this area. It emphasizes the urgent need to evaluate and reform existing policies to better align with the goals of SDG-5. Additionally, the study proposes several strategies aimed at fostering comprehensive women empowerment, focusing on both economic and societal development.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Education, Sustainable Development Goal, Global Gender Gap.

Introduction:

Gender equality has evolved beyond a basic human right; it is now recognized as a crucial foundation for fostering peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable development globally, with India being no exception. For decades, gender equality has been a goal pursued by nations worldwide. Numerous studies have explored aspects such as gender equality (Belingeri et al., 2021), women's empowerment (Duflo, 2012; Huis et al., 2017), the glass ceiling (Williamson et al., 2019; Abendroth et al., 2011), and women entrepreneurship (Sami & Roychowdhury, 2022). However, alarming statistics indicate that approximately 56% of women report

experiencing physical or sexual violence from intimate partners (Abrahams et al., 2022). Further findings from UN reports highlight that victimized women face increased risks of depression, post-traumatic stress, sleep disorders, eating issues, and suicidal tendencies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted during the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September, encompasses 17 goals, with a strong emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. The significance of empowering women is underscored by the placement of "Gender Equality" as the fifth goal among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Notably, achieving this goal is seen as a prerequisite for realizing the other 16

SDGs. The fifth goal aligns with the Global Gender Gap Index, which measures disparities between men and women across key developmental areas, including health, education, economics, and politics.

India, characterized by its rich diversity of over 100 languages and more than 700 tribes, embodies various religions and cultures. Yet, it continues to struggle with achieving true gender equality. Indian society has long been marked by gender discrimination and entrenched patriarchal views affecting both men and women. Against this backdrop, this paper evaluates India's progress concerning SDG 5 and identifies critical areas needing attention to meet this goal by 2030. The structure of the study is as follows: Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review on sustainable development goals and the global gender index. Section 3 outlines the research objectives and methodology. Section 4 analyzes various international and national reports related to gender equality and women's empowerment, while Section 5 offers substantial recommendations to address the challenges hindering gender equality.

Literature review:

Gender equality remains a significant and pressing issue in Indian society, where women constitute 48% of the population. A UN report highlighted that gender-based inequalities are among the most widespread forms of inequality globally, underscoring the intricate connections between Goal 5 and the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Peake & Nyasimi, 2015). Women's empowerment is defined as the ability of women to gain access to power and control over their lives and career decisions (Huis et al., 2020). The inclusion of gender equality in the SDGs stems from the alarming fact that one-third of women worldwide have experienced physical, domestic, or sexual

violence at some point in their lives. The UN aims to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination that undermine women's empowerment and gender equality (Briant Carant, 2016).

Research by **Mintrom and True** (2022) indicates that violence against women surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, with India being particularly affected. Although the Indian Constitution grants women equal rights, discrimination remains deeply entrenched, undermining efforts toward gender equality. Past studies have indicated that India's low female labor force participation rate (25.51%) is a major factor contributing to its lower ranking in the Global Gender Gap (Government of India, 2022). The Global Gender Gap Index measures progress in bridging the disparities between men and women in areas such as health, education, economics, and politics, providing a framework for countries to prioritize gender issues.

Research by **Sania Sami and S. Roychowdhury** (2022) Women empowerment was first addressed at the UN's 1985 conference and has gained momentum over the years. Gender equality ranks fifth among sustainable development goals (SDGs). Despite India prioritizing this issue, women remain in a secondary status within its patriarchal society. This research paper critically examines India's global ranking related to SDG-5, using secondary data from government reports, websites, books, and journals. Findings indicate India's ranking is lower than many developing countries, highlighting the need for policy evaluation and reform. The study recommends measures for comprehensive women empowerment, focusing on both economic and societal development.

According to the World Economic Forum (2024), India ranks 129th out of 146 countries,

with varying performance across the four dimensions of the index. Politically, India ranks 65, the highest among the dimensions, while in education, it falls to 129th. Travel and Tourism Development, India ranks 39th, and in health, it ranks last at 146th, highlighting significant gender disparities. Among the 17 SDGs established by the UN, SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality, presents a considerable challenge for India. Research from NITI Aayog (2024) revealed that only four states—Chandigarh, Sikkim, Kerala, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands—perform well in terms of gender equality, while the majority of states lag behind.

While numerous reports, such as the Global Gender Gap Report and the SDG Report, document gender inequality, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that provide an in-depth comparison of these reports specifically for India over the years. This study aims to fill that gap by comparing these reports and identifying key areas of gender disparity that India must address to tackle the challenges of gender inequality effectively.

Research objectives:

- ❖ To assess the current status of gender equality and women's empowerment in relation to SDG Goal 5 across different regions.
- ❖ To identify barriers that impede women's empowerment and access to resources, including socio-cultural and institutional factors.
- ❖ To analyze the effectiveness of existing policies aimed at promoting gender equality and their impact on sustainable development goals.
- ❖ To document best practices of successful gender equality initiatives that contribute to sustainable development, providing insights for replication.

Research methodology:

This study employs a quantitative approach, primarily utilizing graphical representations to analyze the data. The rationale for incorporating these visuals is to enhance understanding of the various reports examined and to facilitate comparisons between their findings. Secondary data was collected from reputable national and international sources, including NITI Aayog and the United Nations.

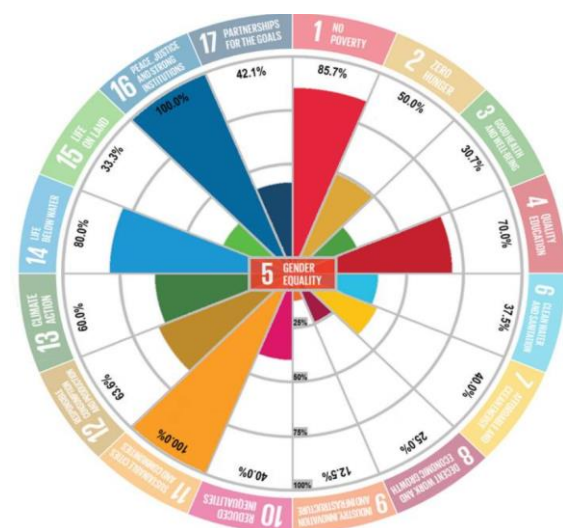
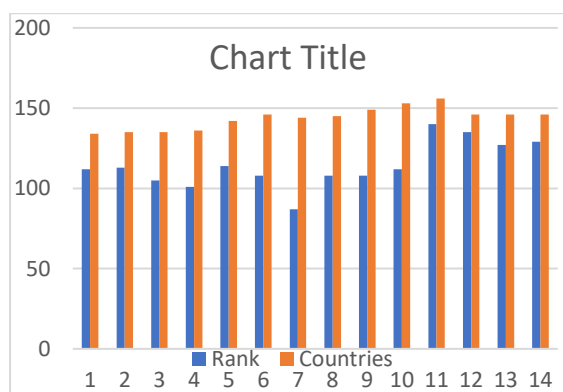
The focus of this study is solely on SDG 5, which encompasses nine key indicators: (i) Sex Ratio at Birth; (ii) Wage Gap (Male/Female); (iii) Domestic Violence; (iv) Women in Leadership; (v) Female Labor Force Participation Rate; (vi) Family Planning; (vii) Crimes Against Women; (viii) Political Participation; and (ix) Operational Land Holding by Women. In contrast, the Global Gender Gap Index is structured around four pillars: health, education, economy, and politics. The analysis of results from the various reports will be presented through graphical representations, which will be discussed in the following section.

Results and discussions:

This study evaluated two key reports on gender inequalities: the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings indicate that gender inequalities primarily stem from gaps in economic participation, educational attainment, access to health services, and political empowerment. While there has been some progress in reducing overall gender inequality, particularly in political empowerment and economic attainment, significant challenges remain. To achieve SDG 5, India must improve performance across all nine indicators. However, the study does have limitations; notably, it does not examine the relationship

between the SDGs and the GGGI. Future research should explore whether a correlation exists between these two frameworks.

Year	Rank	Countries
2010	112	134
2011	113	135
2012	105	135
2013	101	136
2014	114	142
2015	108	146
2016	087	144
2017	108	145
2018	108	149
2020	112	153
2021	140	156
2022	135	146
2023	127	146
2024	129	146



The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), designed by the World Economic Forum, measures gender disparities across four key pillars: health, education, economic participation, and political empowerment. These pillars are interrelated and collectively

assess gender equality. Table 1 displays India's GGGI rankings over the years. India improved its rank from 112 in 2010 to 87 in 2016, but then saw a sharp decline to 129 in 2024. Figure 1 visually represents India's GGGI scores across the years, showing that while India achieved its highest score in 2016, it experienced a decline to 68.4% in 2023 and further to 64.1% in 2024.

The decline in ranking is explained, which analyzes the GGGI's four pillars. Despite advancements in education, health, and political empowerment, India's economic performance has stagnated. The India's GGGI score has consistently dropped since 2016, driven primarily by declines in economic and political aspects, even as improvements in education and health persist. Regarding Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), India has been one of the poorest performers in achieving gender equality. India's score improved from 36 in 2018 to 49 in 2024; however, this slow rate of progress does not position India favourably for meeting SDG 5 objectives. A comprehensive representation of various SDG 5 indicators is essential for a nuanced understanding.

In 2018, there were six indicators for assessing SDG 5, with additional indicators added in subsequent years—two in 2019 and three in 2021. Analysis indicates that women's participation in politics has remained static, while the sex ratio at birth showed little change from 2018 to 2021. The female-to-male Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for individuals aged 15-59 initially increased from 44 in 2018 to 57 in 2019 but fell back to 49 in 2024, partly due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the various indicators, the domestic abuse metric saw significant improvement, increasing from 39 in 2018 to 72 in 2021. India also performed well in other SDG 5 indicators, including family planning, crime rates, and women in

managerial positions. However, the overall performance across these indicators has not been sufficient to achieve the targets of SDG 5.

Conclusions:

The study examined two key reports on gender inequality: the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Findings indicate that gender inequalities stem from disparities in economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health services, and political empowerment. While overall gender inequality has decreased to some extent, primarily due to improvements in political empowerment and economic attainment, India still needs to advance across all nine indicators to meet the SDG targets. However, there are limitations to this study. Notably, it does not explore the relationship between the SDGs and the GGGI. Future research should investigate whether a correlation exists between these two frameworks.

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