

MAPPING GENDER GAP IN ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper intends to analyse the efforts made by India to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It prepares a thorough analysis of the gender challenges in each of the Goals. The interconnectedness of the Goals established in this paper makes it necessary to adopt a holistic approach to promoting gender equality and inclusion. The analyses of data on India include examining the present status, analysing the trend in attaining the target for chosen indicators and projecting the status of India for 2030.

Keywords: SDGs, Women, Girls, Gender Equality.

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into effect in September 2016 when the international community, through a United Nations resolution, pledged to commit itself to 'people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership' (Nicolai et al., 2015). The SDGs, having 17 goals in all with 169 targets, view development as a social, economic and political process of empowerment and go a step further and commit to promoting sustainability for future generations. It includes preservation of biodiversity and ecological systems, adopting sustainable forms of production and cutting back on harmful consumption. By adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (also known as Agenda 2030), the global community has affirmed their dedication to working towards a more just and equitable world, building on the principles set by prior covenants such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979), and the International Conference on Population and Development (1994).

Goal 5 of the SDG goes beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in its commitment to provide specific measures to promote women's rights and eliminate all forms of discrimination, a goal which was first established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In addition, it acknowledges the interconnections between gender equality and the other SDGs with 24 targets explicitly addressing gender. The SDGs acknowledge the socio-cultural, economic, political and ecological inequalities that result in poverty. Women's economic disadvantage is seen not just as a lack of income but as an outcome of systemic and institutional forms of discrimination. Promoting equality between the sexes and inclusivity (leave no one behind) is viewed as fundamental to the achievement of growth, prosperity and peace. Women's contribution to the unpaid care economy is acknowledged for the first time. The gender specific effects of climate change on fuel, fodder and water is also acknowledged. This paper

intends to analyse the efforts made by India to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It prepares a thorough analysis of the gender challenges in each of the Goals. The analyses of data on India include examining the present status, analysing the trend in attaining the target for chosen indicators and projecting the status of India for 2030. The data for analyses is obtained from the NITI Aayog Report (2021), the World Bank Development Report and other UN agencies.

Review of Literature

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for global development, including specific targets and indicators to address various socio-economic challenges. Among these goals, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is a critical priority. This review of literature aims to assess India's progress on SDGs impacting women and girls while focusing on monitoring and measuring indicators that reflect advancement in this area.

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women:

Numerous studies have examined the status of gender equality and women's empowerment in India. These studies analyse indicators such as women's political participation, economic empowerment, access to education, healthcare, and decision-making. Sen G. (2019) found that despite notable progress, gender disparities persist, particularly in terms of women's economic participation and political representation.

Education and Skill Development: Education plays a vital role in empowering women and girls. Studies highlight the importance of ensuring equal access to quality education and skill development opportunities. A study by Dür, M., & Keller, L. (2018) emphasised the significance of girls' education in promoting overall development and achieving SDG targets related to poverty eradication and health outcomes.

Health and Well-being: Monitoring progress in health indicators is crucial for assessing the well-being of women and girls. Studies have explored the impact of SDG-related interventions on maternal health, reproductive rights, access to healthcare, and nutrition. For instance, WHO (2015) examined the progress and challenges in reducing maternal mortality rates and improving reproductive health services in India.

Gender-Based Violence and Safety: Addressing gender-based violence and ensuring women's safety are integral components of SDG targets. Research has focused on understanding the prevalence, causes, and consequences of violence against women and girls in India. Kimuna et al. (2013) explored the factors contributing to domestic violence and highlighted the need for comprehensive strategies to combat this issue.

Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship: Promoting women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship can contribute significantly to achieving multiple SDGs. Studies have investigated the challenges faced by women in accessing financial resources, markets, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Mengstie (2022) examined the role of microfinance in enhancing women's economic empowerment and reducing poverty in rural areas.

The reviewed literature underscores the importance of monitoring India's progress on SDGs impacting women and girls to ensure their empowerment and equal participation. It highlights key areas such as gender equality, education, health, safety, and economic empowerment that require continuous monitoring and evaluation. By effectively tracking the indicators related to these goals, policymakers and stakeholders can design targeted interventions and policies to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in India.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was chosen to

provide an accurate description and interpretation of existing phenomena; in this case, India's advancement on SDGs impacting women and girls. This design will allow the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to assess progress and monitor indicators related to gender equality, education, health, safety, and economic empowerment.

Gender and Poverty

Evidence suggests countries with less gender inequality have lower rates of poverty. Achievement of progress cannot be done without taking along half of the population, specifically women in India. Studies have established improvements in the status of women in the households, which is reflected in the overall improvements for the household as a whole. Women tend to spend a large proportion of their income to secure family health, education and food security leading to better nutrition and health outcomes compared to men (Kabeer, 1999; World Bank Group, 2011; UNDP, 2018).

Poor households are vulnerable to shocks such as disaster, death of the male household member or ill-health in the family. Reducing risks would need to address intra-household disparities in access to wealth, employment and decision-making. Securing the rights of the most marginalised members of poor households in effect helps buffer them from shocks and minimise the risk of them slipping further. If India ensured equal access to resources like land, property, livestock, and finances for women, their participation in the workforce would greatly increase and India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would reach \$2.5 trillion by 2025, according to the McKinsey report (2015). By addressing gender inequality in the labour force, not only would poverty lessen drastically, but income would rise and inequality would decrease. Promoting gender equality and economic opportunity for women also helps break the cycle of intergenerational poverty (World Bank Group, 2011)

Gender and Basic Services: Health, Water and Sanitation and Education

Gender inequalities in access to health and health outcomes persist despite attempts at universal health coverage. In this section, we will discuss women's reproductive and sexual health status with respect to maternal mortality, infant mortality, contraception prevalence and sex ratio in the context of guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including contraception, as mandated by the Sustainable Development Goal 3.

Over the past decade, maternal mortality in India has dropped dramatically from 212 to 145

recorded in 2017. In particular, the Empowered Action Group (EAG) states have experienced a considerable decline from 308 to 257 and the Southern States, from 127 to 105. On the other hand, the other states have also seen a reduction from 149 to 127 (Meh et.al, 2021). Female children experience a higher mortality rate than their male counterparts. Reasons for this are deeply entrenched socio-cultural values with strong 'son preference' leading to girl child neglect. In times of scarcity, the health and nutrition requirements of women and girls are given less importance than that of men and boys in deprived homes, resulting in their needs being pushed to the lower rungs of priority.

Table 1

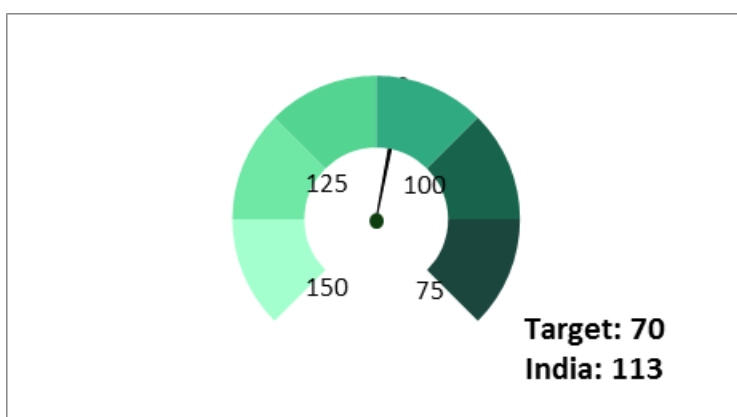
Maternal Mortality Ratio in India and the World

Series Name	Country	2000	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)	India	370	197	185	175	166	158	150	145
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)	World	342	241	234	229	224	219	214	211

Source: World Bank DataBank (databank.worldbank.org, accessed on August, 2021).

Figure 1

Maternal Mortality Ratio in India



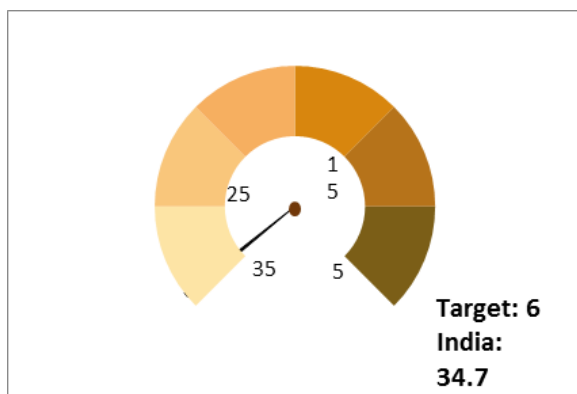
Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

Figures 2 and 3 depict the present status of stunted and underweight children in India towards attaining the target by 2030. India has still a long

way to go for achievement in terms of child nourishment.

Figure 2

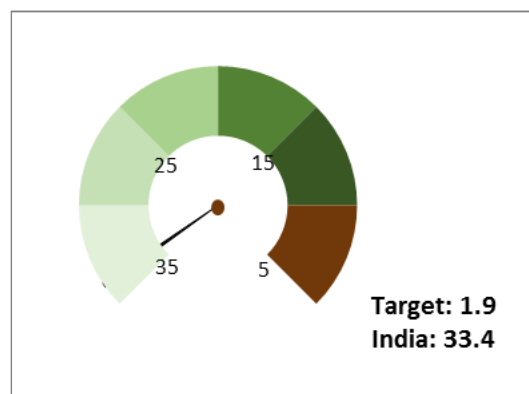
Stunted Growth of Children



Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

Figure 3

Underweight Children



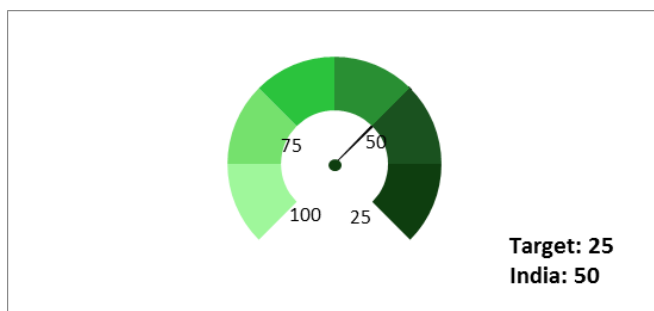
Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

As per the 2011 Census of India, there has been a marked improvement in the infant mortality rate (IMR) in the period between 2008-2013, with the current IMR nationally at 40 per 1000 live births, which is down from 53 per live births in

2008. Still, this continues to be well below the SDG target of neo-natal mortality of 12 per 1000 live births and under-5 mortality of 25 per 1000 live births.

Figure 4

Under 5 Mortality Rate in India



Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

Fertility Rate

In 2013, the fertility rate of rural women as per Sample Registration System (SRS) data was 2.5 per woman whereas the fertility rate of urban women was 1.8. The fertility rates in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and

West Bengal were below the replacement rate of 2.1. In comparison, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had higher fertility rates at 3.4 and 3.1, respectively.

The census 2011 has noted a reduction in a woman's fertility rate with an increase in education. Women with 5-7 years of education have one child less than women with less education (Bhalla &

Kaur, 2011). In addition, “increase in age at marriage, social awareness and incentives for family planning” have led to a decline in fertility rates (Raveendran, 2016). Poverty also plays a significant role in determining fertility. Therefore, any efforts at tackling the fertility rate, to be effective, would need to address poverty reduction (SDG 1) and promote education of women (SDG 4) in addition to strengthening access to health and improved health outcomes.

Access to Sanitation

According to the World Bank and UNICEF data, only 39.6 per cent of people had access to sanitation facilities in 2015. India has the highest number of people practising open defecation making up 59 per cent of the world’s numbers on open defecation (O’Reilly, 2016). The poor, socially disadvantaged and women bear the burden of inadequate water and sanitation. The most detrimentally impacted individuals from limited water and sanitation services and availability are women and girls, who primarily serve as users, suppliers, and managers for water and hygiene within the home.

In addition to fewer toilets, inferior conditions of toilets such as poor design, inadequate water supply, lack of cleanliness and maintenance, insufficient lighting, and no locks on doors make it unusable for women (O’Reilly, 2016). Adolescent girls and women face a heightened risk of sexual violence and harassment when they have to wait until dark to use the bathroom outdoors. Menstrual

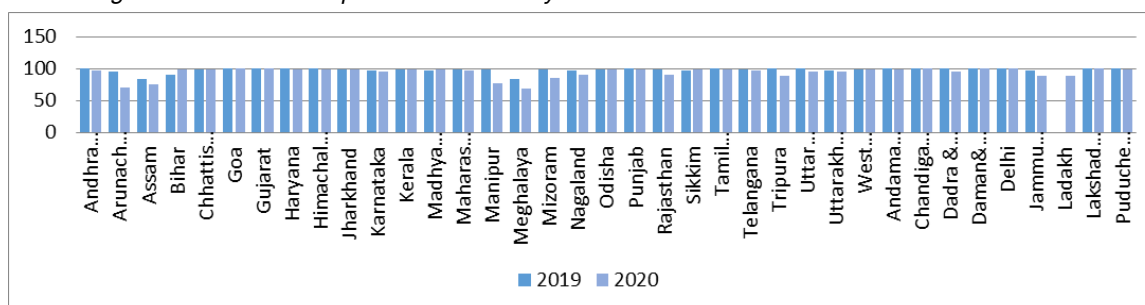
hygiene needs of adolescent girls and women are often not fulfilled in public spaces, and may result in girls dropping out of school or staying away, and women abstaining from productive work. Besides, the health consequences of inadequate water and sanitation are serious – 1000 children die every day as a result of diarrhoea, contributing to one-fifth of under-5 deaths while 39 per cent of children under-5 are stunted as per SRS 2013.

The launch of the *Swachh Bharat Mission* (Clean India Movement) has helped to bring the issue to the fore. Although the current policy does acknowledge the requirements of women and has attempted to involve women at every stage, it has been critiqued for being top-down in its approach with an over-emphasis on toilet construction (Chambers et al., 2018). Also, efforts to simultaneously expand the total coverage of water alongside sanitation have not been undertaken, leading to unused toilet facilities on the ground (Hueso, 2016).

From a gender standpoint, secured access to water and sanitation services is essential for the health, welfare, and productivity of women and adolescent girls. A successful sanitation policy would need to put their needs at the centre while mobilising the community to take ownership of their sanitation situation. Improving sanitation would also contribute to achieving SDG 3.2 “end preventable deaths for new-borns and children under 5” as well as addressing SDG 4 “inclusive and equitable quality education”. Figure 5 depicts the availability of toilet facility for girls across the states in India.

Figure 5

Percentage of Schools with Separate Toilet Facility for Girls



Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

Access to Water

UNICEF data from 2014 reveals India underwent an improvement in access to drinking water, with 534 million people having access to this source between 1990 and 2012. The World Bank states the percentage of the population with improved water sources to be 94.1 per cent. However, India may not be able to reach its set goal of providing “universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all” by 2030. This is according to a study performed by the National Commission for Women (2005), which noted that women are spending 150 million work days every year fetching and transporting water, giving them less time for educational or income-generating activities. Also, scheduled and backward castes are subject to discriminatory practices in water distribution in rural areas. Communal tube wells, hand pumps and borewells for drinking water, which are the main sources of drinking water in rural areas, are often contaminated. The situation is further aggravated by drought-like conditions in several states due to the failure of rainfall for three successive years. This has a direct bearing on time spent by women and sometimes children, in water collection – an increase of some three to six-fold in time spent, in some cases. In these instances, women and adolescent girls are still unable to maintain personal hygiene due to lack of water.

Education

Multiple factors contribute to the poor educational status of girl children, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. Distance to schools, especially in rural areas, plays an important part in girl children dropping out of secondary education. Higher birth order also affects opportunities for girl children from poor households as they are expected to take care of their younger siblings. Evidence shows poor performance of girls when compared with younger siblings, in mathematics and reading (White et al., 2016). Girls are also expected to assist their mothers in household chores, giving them less time to pursue studies,

which, in turn, affects their performance (Kaur et.al, 2022).

Insufficient infrastructure, like lack of water-equipped toilets, can lead to girls missing school due to menstruation and facing safety risks. Accessible and affordable transportation is vital for girls’ education. Discrimination causes a high dropout rate among students from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, negatively impacting their educational outcomes (Ramachandran & Chatterjee, 2014). Other children requiring special attention and support are the disabled, as well as street children and children of migrants, who often fall through the cracks with little or no data to document their absence and plight.

Gender Equality and Inclusion

The SDG on gender and the efforts to mainstream gender across the remaining goals is remarkable as it indicates a more mature understanding of empowerment and poverty reduction. Goal 5 on Gender Equality goes beyond its precursor in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address difficult and sensitive issues such as violence against women, and rights of women over productive assets and recognises unpaid care work undertaken by women as a major constraint in promoting women’s and girls’ empowerment.

Women’s Political Participation

In 2014, India saw an increase in female representation in ministerial roles, with the Global Gender Gap report documenting a doubling from 9 per cent to 22 per cent. Despite this, female representation in the Lok Sabha – the lower house of India’s parliament – remains low, with only 61 of the 543 members being women, amounting to 11 per cent of the total. The pace of change in terms of women’s representation in Parliament has been very slow over the past 70 years.

The gains for women in political representation at the senior levels have been modest compared to

the progress achieved in local bodies in the past few decades. Women's representation in local bodies received a huge boost with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which guaranteed one-third representation of women, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes in all local bodies. Studies have shown that reservation of seats for Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes increased their access to infrastructure and services through government schemes.

Women's political participation is known to have positive outcomes for women. Studies show women in local government tend to make decisions with better outcomes for the community when charged with budget decisions, are more competent than men and better able to raise resources despite lower levels of education and public exposure (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Women's political participation has positive outcomes for children. Women in leadership have greater autonomy, mobility and access to decisions that affect the households. There is strong evidence connecting the increase in women's entrepreneurship to the implementation of political reservation (Chiplunkar & Goldberg, 2021). Admittedly, this is more in the traditional unorganised sector and home-based industries and

not transformative. Another remarkable fallout of women's political empowerment is the increase in reporting of crimes against women (Krook & Sanin, 2020).

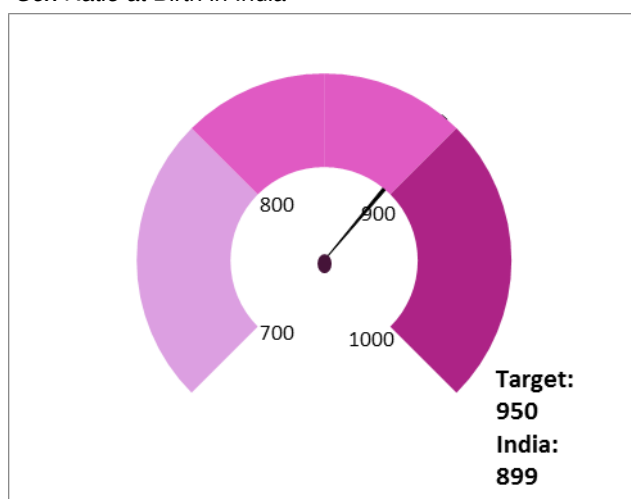
Violence against Women

As stated in the McKinsey report (2015), 163 million women have experienced violence from intimate partners. Reportedly, 337,922 crimes against women were committed in 2014, of which the highest percentage (43.6 per cent) was related to domestic violence, followed by assault (18.6 per cent), kidnapping (15.7 per cent) and rape (10.2 per cent). Women and girls face violence right from conception, through birth, adolescence and adulthood. Violence against women prevents women and girls from realising their full potential, exercising their rights freely and contributing to growth and development.

The skewed sex ratio is a matter of concern. Regional differences and inconsistent reduction in sex ratio across the states are matters of concern. Figure 6 shows that the target set for India in sex ratio is 950 whereas, at present, the sex ratio at birth is 899. Still, there is a long way to go to achieve the target.

Figure 6

Sex Ratio at Birth in India



Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21

Despite the implementation of a wealth of laws and regulations designed to protect against offences against women, such as the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005, Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code, and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 to list a few, numerous women still opt not to report these issues due to the fear of public humiliation and marginalisation that can result. The areas of law are continually monitored and adjusted, yet even this does not appear to inspire courage to speak out. Most often these crimes are committed by intimate partners or acquaintances. Women are also blamed for inciting these attacks both by their own families, police and the legal system being subjected to further humiliation. Socio-cultural norms impose strong controls over a woman's mobility, her dress, who she can socialise with, her ability to speak freely and how she conducts herself. National Crime Records Bureau comes out with statistics about the crime rate of women frequently. In terms of variations between the different states, Delhi leads with the highest crime rate at 169.1 per one lakh women compared to the all-India incidence of 56.3. As per a study, 92 per cent of women reported having some experience of sexual assault in public spaces and 88 per cent reported having experienced verbal sexual harassment. Violence against women and girls limits access to education, livelihood and political participation. It impacts women's and girl's health and often loss of wages through disruption of livelihoods/inability to involve in prolific work even if only temporary. It also restricts a woman's ability to control her body and reproductive choices. Although violence against women is a result of structural inequality and discrimination against women, other factors such as poverty and lack of inadequate infrastructure such as poor lighting, safe public transport, water and sanitation aggravate the situation. Riddance of violence against women is connected to many of the SDGs – poverty reduction, health, education, infrastructure, gender equality, water and sanitation, economic growth, reduced inequality and the necessity for building peaceful and inclusive societies.

Child Marriage

Child marriage affects opportunities and potential for growth of the individual woman in multifaceted ways. They tend to have lower levels of education than their unmarried peers. They are less able to influence and control decisions that affect their lives, given prevailing gender inequalities and strong age hierarchies within the household and community. Under-age and young married women have little or no say in reproductive choices and decisions related to childbirth such as when to have a child, spacing and matters regarding contraception or decisions regarding involvement in the labour market. The facts - under-age mothers are less likely to have access to health facilities and their bodies are not ready to give birth - undermine both the health of the mother and child, and put them at risk (Psaki et.al, 2021; Paul, 2019; Malhotra, A., & Elnakib, S., 2021).

Despite the substantive decline in the incidence of child marriage, particularly under 15 years over the past few decades, India is unlikely to wipe it out entirely for girls under 18 years by 2030. In 2014, 33 per cent of child brides were Indian girls, and of all marriages, 47 per cent were aged below 18, according to UNICEF. If things continue as they currently are, it is projected that the proportion of child brides globally will decrease from 33 per cent in 1985 to 22 per cent by 2030. India has the most to gain through accelerated programmes to bring down its average of 1 in 3 brides to 1 in 5, by 2030. Clearly, the SDG target of elimination of harmful practices such as child and early marriage will not be achieved unless the pace of decline of child marriage is accelerated.

Financial Inclusion

In Goal 1 of the SDG, it is stated that microfinance constitutes one of the ways to put an end to poverty. This section evaluates women's access to financial services, identifying the issues still present and foreseeing future challenges. Financial inclusion and digital inclusion are two key areas for improvement for India to progress on

gender equality and tackle poverty. The ability of the poor, especially women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to take advantage of economic opportunity is constrained by the lack of credit to manage shocks and crises. Access to a bank account is necessary for women's enterprises and businesses. It forms the baseline for women to leverage capital in the form of credit and bank loans (Forrester & Neville 2021).

According to Swaniti Initiative, women-owned MSMEs in 2012 leveraged an estimated Rupees 2.31 trillion, with a further finance gap of Rupees 6.37 trillion. Increased access to microcredit enables women to purchase raw materials and productive assets required to run their enterprises. Responsible and efficient access to financial services helps poor women to somewhat overcome this barrier. Studies have also shown women as borrowers have a higher repayment rate and are less likely to default (Patel, 2014). Women also need financial literacy along with improved access to financial services to enable them to plan better and manage their finances.

In August 2014, the Prime Minister's Jan DhanYojana (PMJDY) was initiated with the goal that every family would have at least one bank account. This led to an expansion in bank account ownership from 52 per cent in mid-2014 to 63 per cent at the end of 2015. However, only 58 per cent of adult women had a bank account when compared to 68 per cent of men. As for those households living beneath the poverty line, 60 per cent had an account. Among the 370 million accounts opened before October 2015, active account holders increased from 29 per cent in 2014 to 42 per cent in 2015. Overall, of the total 63 per cent of bank accounts, only 45 per cent are active and of these active accounts, women constituted 35 per cent and those beneath the poverty line made up 37 per cent (Intermedia, 2014).

There are clear gender differences in accessing financial services. Insufficient rural bank branches, low penetration in poor and hard-to-reach areas and attitude of bank staff are some of the supply-side constraints (Kandpal) faced by women. On the

demand side, the barriers include lack of financial literacy, feeling intimidated by the banking process, distance of bank branches requiring time and mobility, social-cultural norms by which men are designated managers of money with greater mobility and autonomy, women's double burden and women's lack of control over economic decisions in the household.

Women in Workforce

It should be of serious concern that only 24 per cent of Indian women are part of the workforce compared to the global average of 40 per cent (McKinsey, 2015). Furthermore, even with better health outcomes and economic growth, their participation rate decreased in 2011-2012. To make matters worse, the quality of work available to women is sub-par compared to that of men as wages are 30 per cent lower. Even more traumatising is the fact that 62 per cent of women in the workforce are engaged in agriculture and farm-related activities, which is a declining sector (McKinsey, 2015). This is a problem as a decline in poverty is closely linked to the employment status of women.

Among other social groups, Muslim women have the poorest labour force participation rates, whilst ST women have the highest participation rate, mostly as casual workers. Despite the Act (Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1968) prohibiting children under 14 from being employed, 2.4 million boys and 1.6 million girls still remain in labour. (Raveendran, 2016) and this is of serious concern from the point of view of intergenerational poverty.

Educated women with graduate and higher qualifications had an unemployment rate of 14.6 per cent versus 5.8 per cent for men with similar qualifications, implying discrimination in the job market. (Raveendran, 2016). The likelihood of men being hired for the same job is higher, and this is consistent with the notion of 'men as breadwinners' and women as more committed to family.

Factors that limit women from engaging in

productive work include social attitudes and cultural norms that view men as the heads of households and primary breadwinners. This, in turn, affects women's access to productive assets such as ownership of land and availability of finance. Such norms and attitudes also constrain women's mobility and decision-making, placing severe constraints on their ability to earn an income. Added to this is women's vulnerability to violence and harassment in the workplace.

McKinsey Report from 2015 showed that female members of the family put in up to 10 times more unpaid housework than their male counterparts. Rigid labour laws do not provide the flexibility that women need because they often have to balance both their family lives and their professional lives. Furthermore, 80 per cent of women, who are not in the workforce, are weighed down by caregiving and home roles, while the lack of occupational parity with men keeps women closed off from certain occupations and even hinders their ability to find employment in growing fields (Kapsos et al., 2014).

Overall, women in India tend to have lower levels of education as compared to men. While women with lower levels of education generally participate in unpaid or casual labour, women with higher qualifications are more likely to have wage employment. Education has been seen to play a major role in job security and the quality of work provided. According to Bhalla and Kaur (2011), for every extra year of education received by women, there is an increase of 0.6 percentage points in their participation in the labour force. However, research conducted by Das et al. (2015) has found that increased education of the male spouse can lead to a decrease in female participation, with each extra year of education the husband has led to a one percentage point drop in female participation.

The age, marital status, and presence of children have considerable influence on a woman's ability to join the paid workforce, with those in households with children under 3 years having the lowest participation rate. This highlights the

obstruction childrearing poses to women's involvement in the labour force and requires urgent attenuation (Raveendran, 2016). As wealth increases in a household, women often withdraw from jobs which have low productivity or require basic survival (Bhalla & Kaur, 2011). Divorced, widowed, or single-handedly raising children women display the highest involvement in the labour force due to the imperative need for providing sustenance for themselves and the autonomy they gain.

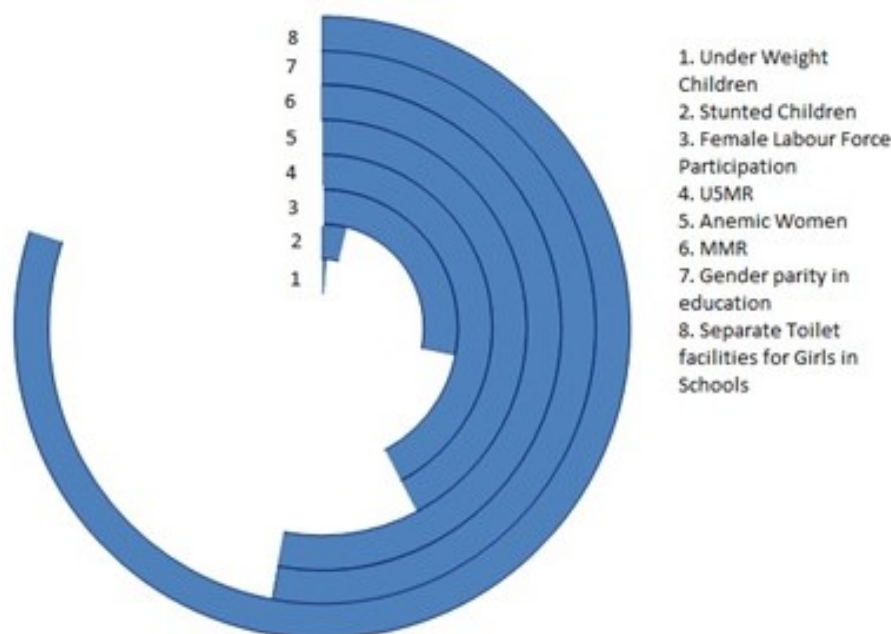
Figure 1 shows how India is doing in achieving different targets of SDGs that focus on the development of women and girls. Different indicators are at different levels. While India is trying to achieve access and services towards water and sanitation for women and adolescent girls, it is yet to start its score towards reducing the number of underweight children. Schemes like POSHAN Abhiyan, which focuses on the better health of women and children, have gained momentum in recent years and this nutrition mission will help to achieve the better health status of women and children and accomplish the target by 2030. Similar flagship programmes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, and National Social Assistance Programme will help to enhance the status of women and girls by 2030.

Conclusion

The interconnectedness of the Goals established in the preceding analysis makes it necessary to adopt a holistic approach to promoting gender equality and inclusion. Removing barriers to gender equality and inclusion is critical to growth, progress and reduction in poverty. The SDGs' 'leave no behind' principle requires political commitment demonstrated through the provision of efficient delivery of public services and appropriate investments to resource these. This demands collaborative partnership between diverse institutions and ministries at the national and state levels, and local bodies working towards the common goal(s). It also demands a convergence

Figure 1

How Girls and Women are Doing in India towards Achieving the Target?



Source: Computed from NITI Aayog, SDG India Index, 2020-21.

approach between various stakeholders and line departments concerned at the field level. Community-based institutions like SHGs and their federations also need to be made part of the entire process. Panchayati Raj Institutions should be spearheading this initiative. These would need to be backed by strong institutional arrangements and public administration practices for ease of delivery of integrated approaches.

Some indicative actions which require long-term plans to propel SDG progress are outlined below:

- i. Integrate gender equality consistently in laws and programmes
- ii. Integrate gender equality in making economic decisions both at the central and state level budgets
- iii. Adopt cultural specificity in approaching gender equality; for instance, combat 'son preference', support care work and property rights for women

- iv. Increase investments in public services including health, water and sanitation and education

Active engagement with civil society and women's groups in taking forward the 2030 Agenda

Some indicative actions which require short-term and immediate actions are listed below:

- i. Implementation needs to be multi-departmental requiring co-ordinated monitoring and accountability systems
- ii. Integrate gender across departments engaged in different SDGs within their:
 - Policy and programme
 - Structures: focal points and committees
 - Budgets and Expenditure
 - Staff capacity
- iii. Take into account regional and state-level variations on different starting points and put in place state-level targets and flexible implementation plans

- iv. Specific targeting of SC, ST and minorities who are furthest behind and accelerate progress on achievements of goals for these groups in keeping with the 'leave no one behind principle' of the SDGs
- v. Invest in improved gender-sensitive data and analysis of disaggregated data to identify gaps/challenges

Author Contributions:

Vanishree Joseph: Conceptualisation, analysis and drafting of the paper

N. V. Madhuri: Analysis, critically review and finalisation of the draft

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