

Women Empowerment Strategies for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to explore the strategic role of empowering women in achieving sustainable development of our country. Gender inequality is very much deep-rooted in our society and women still suffer from gender wage gaps and access to good quality of work life. UN Sustainable goal 5 i.e., to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls lays the foundation for a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world. Hence, the present study examines various reports and reviews literature to understand the present scenario and participation of women in political, economic, social and environmental areas. The study also explores the benefits and the challenges women face and also recommends women's empowerment strategies for using women's workforce for the sustainable development of the country, as they constitute nearly 50% of the population.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Gender equality, Sustainable development, UN Sustainable goals

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment enhances self-confidence, safety, generates income for the family, improves health, and in turn, it leads to the nation's development. As the country progresses, it needs to pay more attention to social, economic and human development. Women empowerment is a significant aspect in achieving gender equality, where both men and women will be having equal opportunities and power in education, healthcare, economic participation and personal development.

Women empowerment helps to develop an ability for critical thinking, fosters decision-making skills, ensures equal participation in developmental processes and enhances self-esteem and confidence in women.

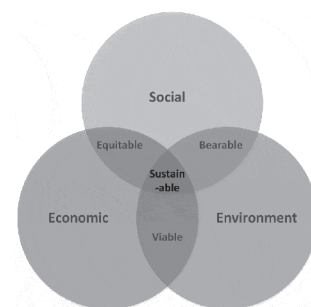


Figure 1: Women empowerment for sustainable development

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

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UN Sustainable Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls lays the foundation for a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world. When UN Goal 5 is achieved, it can also lead to the achievement of UN Sustainable goals 10 and 11 too.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

UN vision is to achieve sustainable goals by 2030 and every country is striving towards it. Women play a very important role in the economic development of the country and achieving the UN goals, hence this study is undertaken to understand the current scenario (Specifically India) and present strategies or focused areas to empower women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To review the literature on the current status of the women's role in political, social, economic and environmental areas
2. To identify the challenges faced in empowering women
3. To evolve the strategies for women empowerment for sustainable development

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, secondary data is collected from various reports and E-resources like UN report, McKinsey report, World Economic Forum's report, world bank reports etc. and analysed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Women Empowerment - History in India

The history of India shows that Articles 14 to 16 (26 January 1950) in the Indian Constitution reflect equal rights for men and women. India is the second country to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, in the year 1966. The Acts and Laws mention clearly that discrimination of people based on gender is strictly prohibited. Several Acts such as The Domestic Violence Act, 2005, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Maternity Benefit Act, 2017 were included in the constitution to protect Women from Domestic Violence, dowry system and support them during maternity. Indian Government also has come out with the Women's Reservation Bill which gives 33% reservation for women in politics, education and other sectors too.

In order to empower women in various areas and fields, the government also introduced various schemes like MUDRA Scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila-E-Haat Yojana scheme, etc.

Summary of facts of Women Empowerment

- According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020, India's position is 112th (108th position in 2018) among 153 economies.
- The ILO's Global Wage Report 2018-19 mentions that the average pay gender gap is 34.5% which is highest in India among 73 countries
- Women in India represented 35% of the total labour force in 2004 which reduced to 19.9% in the year 2020
- 50% of the world's population comprises women, but they only own about 1% of the world's wealth.
- Nearly 50% of India's females do not have their own bank/ savings accounts, and 60% of them have no valuable assets in their name.
- Globally, it is estimated that Females earn income, which is a mere one-fifth of male income and is a 144th Country in the world.

- It is estimated in 2020 that women earn 16% less in average hourly wages and 22% less in median monthly wages, with large variations between countries
- As per the Global Equality Index 2019, it is estimated that women in India contribute nearly 17% of the national GDP as against the global average of 40%
- McKinsey’s research suggests that in India 97% of all female workers are active in the informal sector who are engaged in domestic work and low-paying activities
- More than 50% of India’s women do not have cell phones, and 80% do not have phones to connect to the internet.
- During pandemic 2020, 70% of workers who were employed in the health sector were women and in fact were facing higher infection risks than men in the workplace.
- According to a catalyst survey report, only 26% of women are less likely to participate in the gig economy as compared to 32% of men.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION IN THE WORLD

It is examined that women continue to be under-represented with only 35% in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and less than a third of the world's researchers in scientific research and development.

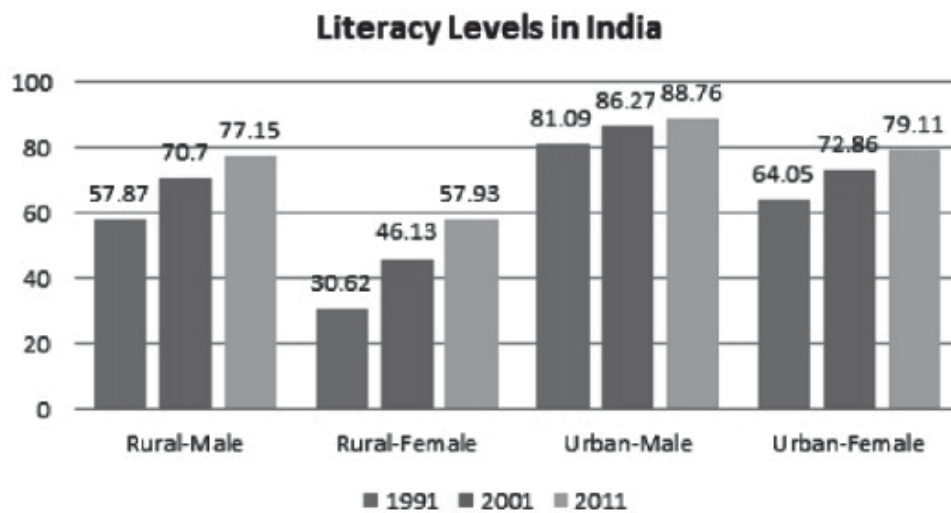


Figure 2: Literacy Levels in India from 1991 to 2011
 (Source: <https://factly.in/rural-india-behind-urban-india-in-progress-indicators/>)

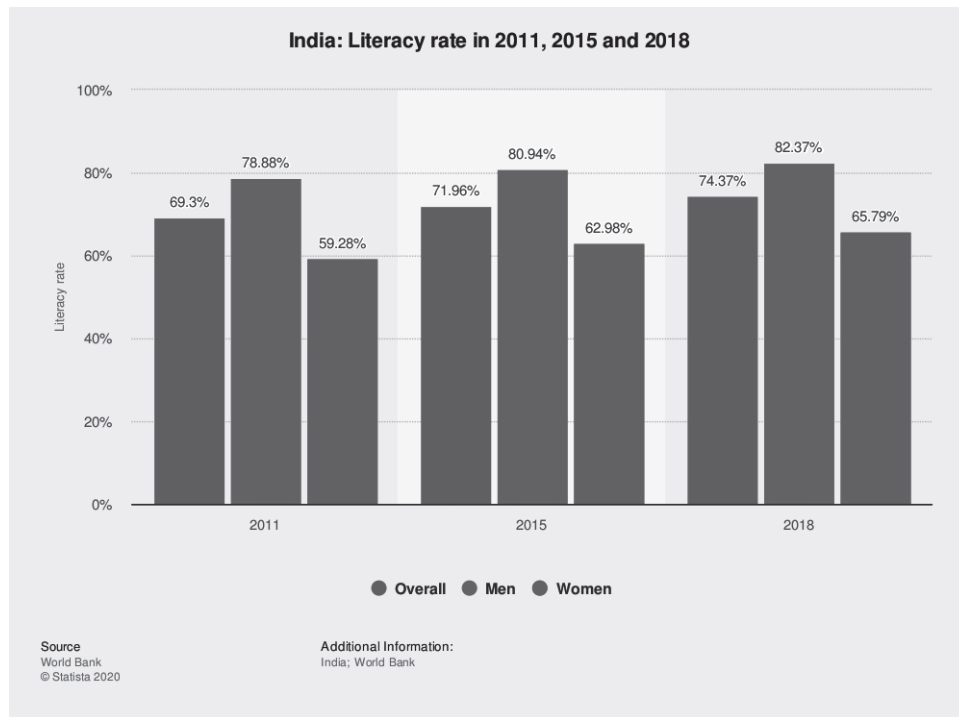


Figure 3: Literacy rate in 2011, 2015 and 2018

According to the article in New Indian Express in 2020, the rural male literacy accounts to 81.5% and female 65% and urban literacy rate accounts to 92.2% and female is 82.8%

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDUSTRY

Globally, women held only 28% of managerial positions in 2019 and were almost the same proportion in the year 1995 too. According to May 2019 fortune list, only 33 women (6.6%) were CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and only 7.4%, that is 37 chief executive officers, were women in 2020. It was also reported that women account for less than a third (29%) of senior roles globally and held 20% of the board of directors worldwide in 2019 when compared to 17.9% in 2018.

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Index Ranking 2020

GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX RANKINGS 2020			%AGE OF WOMEN IN COMPANIES' BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Top five countries in each category)	
Rank	Country	Score		
1	Iceland	0.877	OVER ONE-THIRD	
2	Norway	0.842	France	43.4%
3	Finland	0.832	Iceland	43%
4	Sweden	0.820	Norway	42.1%
5	Nicaragua	0.804	Sweden	36.3%
6	New Zealand	0.799	Italy	34%
7	Ireland	0.798	OVER ONE FIFTH	
8	Spain	0.795	Netherlands	29.5%
9	Rwanda	0.791	Latvia	28.8%
10	Germany	0.787	Australia	28.7%
21	United Kingdom	0.767	United Kingdom	27.2%
50	Bangladesh	0.726	Canada	25.8%
53	United States	0.724	OVER ONE-TENTH	
81	Russian Federation	0.706	Austria	19.2%
92	Brazil	0.691	Ireland	17.6%
101	Nepal	0.680	Portugal	16.2%
102	Sri Lanka	0.680	Slovak Republic	15.1%
106	China	0.676	Colombia	15.1%
112	India	0.668	India	13.8%
121	Japan	0.652		
151	Pakistan	0.564		
153	Yemen	0.494		

Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2020; Scores from 0 to 1, where 0 is the lowest

From the above table, it can be observed that India's Score is only 0.668 and only 13.8% (that is 1/10th) of the women are in companies as the board of directors.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Women's representation in parliament is not more than 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020 and as cabinet ministers is 22%.

Women in Lok Sabha

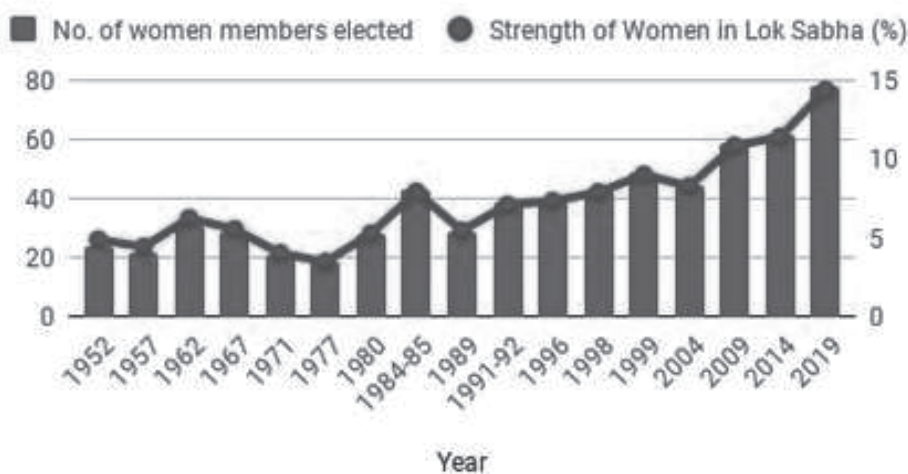


Figure 4: Percentage of Women in Lok Sabha

[Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/representation-of-women-in-17th-lok-sabha/article28769003.ece>]

In 2020, Lok Sabha had a participation of 78 women out of 543 and Rajya Sabha had 25 women out of 245 women.

Ecofeminism word was coined by feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 which ideologically links the environmental crisis with gender. It also highlights the importance of the role of women in the conservation of the environment. According to UN Women report, women are more likely to use natural resources than men for the overall welfare of the family.

A limited study was undertaken to study the comprehensive women's role in political, social, economic and environmental areas. Also, studies on women empowerment's role to achieve sustainability are limited. Hence, this study is undertaken to understand women's participation in various fields.

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

From the review of literature, it can be examined that there exists a gender gap and there is an urgent need to empower women for the economic development of the country. When women are empowered, it becomes very easy to achieve UN sustainable goals.

BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Some of the benefits of women empowerment

- As women spend 90 percent of their family income, if they are empowered they can boost the demand.
- Will have a direct, positive impact on productivity and profitability in existing and emerging markets.
- Next generation can be empowered
- Makes women Self-reliant, self – confident and independent
- Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8, 1.3 and 10.

Challenges/issues of Women Empowerment

- Unequal pay
- Lack of education access
- Sexual harassment
- Often women are promoted less when compared to men
- Fear of asking to be paid what you're worth
- Violence, forced marriage and discrimination
- Lack of employment equality
- Lack of legal protections
- Poor medical care
- Lack of religious freedom
- Lack of political representation
- Poor Health and safety
- Structural barriers and cultural norms/restrictions
- The Indian legal system gaps between policy and practice.
- Participation of women in the decision-making processes.
- Mind set to be changed especially, of the males who dominate the scene.
- To convince one's family to let women work
- Lack of mindful efforts, on the part of corporate organizations to nurture and groom women for senior management roles.
- Literacy rates of Females in rural area are low when compared to the urban area.

Strategies suggested for Women Empowerment

- Educating the girls/ women to increase the Literacy rate
- Creating awareness in girls and women about the women schemes, rights and laws
- Awareness sessions for Parents regarding ways to empower women/daughters
- Rights to inherit property and own land
- Access to credit and earn income
- Workplace policies to be improved
- promotion in the workplace
- free from job discrimination
- To make women part of the decision-making
- Quality of work-life
- Security measures
- Vocational /technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to develop marketable skills and decision-making abilities
- Enhancing women's access to ICT and internet can create more business opportunities
- Encouraging more CEOs to pledge their support towards gender equality.
- Identify mentors who can lead other organisations in their sector to adopt gender-equal policies
- Creating ways to increase brand/ PR value for organisations that encourage women in their workforce
- Enable cross-pollination of best practices by:
- Leveraging existing platforms and content
- Identifying role models
- Storytelling
- Sharing success stories and policies
- Encouragement to participate in the environment, political and economic areas
- To reduce Violence against women and girls by imposing stringent laws
- To increase the participation of women in formal sector
- To amend the existing labour laws by introducing new anti-discrimination provisions and child-care policies
- To improve nutrition and access to health care

- Encouraging women's Self-Help Groups that allow them to strategise developmental projects and take charge of the decision-making process and finances

IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS

- When women are empowered, the literacy rate is improved, the gender gap is reduced, poverty is reduced, inequality is reduced and optimal usage of natural resources increases and natural resources are well protected.
- Women's participation in policymaking and decision making can help countries to achieve UN Sustainable development goals 5, 10, 1 & 2 effectively.

CONCLUSION

If India has to become a \$5-trillion economy by 2025, women participation in political, economic, social and environmental areas can help to achieve the same as well as sustainable development. When the strategies are implemented effectively, it will enable women to seize opportunities and they can play an active role in family, community and society at large.

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