

Women Empowerment & Sustainable Development Goal-5 in India: Prospects and Challenges

Paper Submission: 10/10/2021, Date of Acceptance: 20/10/2021, Date of Publication: 24/10/2021

Abstract

In India, a no of policy measures have been adopted for the betterment of women. In number they are approximately half of the population, while their contribution to Economy is not significant. They are lagging behind at socio- economic and political grounds. So there is a need to empower them. Gender equity and women empowerment has also been a global concern for policymakers. Out of 17 Sustainable Development goals, the 5th one belongs to women empowerment and gender parity. In this study we will focus on the present scenario and the future prospects regarding SDG-5 in the Indian context. Education can play a pivotal role for the overall development of women on socio- economic and political grounds. Because education has a power, enable someone to recognise their abilities.

Keywords: Empowerment, Gender parity, Sustainable development, etc.

Introduction

Since independence, a number of initiatives have been adopted by our Government to improve the women's position in India. These initiatives have been concerned to all the spheres of a woman's life. As our Constitution became effective on 26 January 1950, the preamble of the Constitution talks about justice, liberty and equality to all its citizens. It allows no discrimination among its nationals on the basis of gender, etc.

As per statistics approximately half of the population is of women in India. But, their contribution to the economy has remained marginal. More of them are working in the unorganised sector as compared to the organised sector. In rural areas, they are primarily indulged in agriculture and allied activities. A large number of women are economically dependent on their male partners. Being Economically dependent on others, they are lagging behind on socio, economic and political grounds. It is quite evident if we have to achieve a high growth rate, then half of our population should contribute a lot. The importance of this section of our society could not be denied.

During 90's India Adopted new economic policy framework comprising - Liberalisation, Globalisation and Privatisation. India has become responsible to meet global standards. United Nations General Assembly has adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (there-in-after SDGs) during 2015. They have been replaced by Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals should be achieved by each nation up to 2030. Most of the goals are interlinked to each other. India is also committed to achieve SDGs within the prescribed time limits.

As our study is confined to Women Empowerment, we will concentrate on the gender equality issues on social, economical and political grounds. We will only concentrate on SDG-5 out of 17 SDGs. SDG-5 stated by the United Nations refers to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". In Indian context- "The nation's highest ambition codified in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-5, is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Further its ambit covers eradicating discrimination and violence against women and giving equal rights to economic resources and access to property ownership." (India Today, 2020). In India, National Institute for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) has been given the responsibility to construct a roadmap to achieve SDGs in a phased manner. And to measure the progress at national and sub national level regarding different indicators of SDGs. An index named 'SDG India Index 2021' has been released by NITI Aayog recently.

Objective of the Study

In the present paper, first we will define both the concepts of Women Empowerment as well as Sustainable Development. And, after defining these concepts, we will move towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Second, we will briefly discuss major initiatives adopted by our government in the concerned area during 1947-2014. Third, we will mainly concentrate on the Indian Government's initiatives to attain SDG-5 commitments in the present scenario. Fourth, we will try to find out the



Nidhi

Assistant Professor
Dept. of Economics
Government P. G.
College Khair,
Aligarh, U.P., India

future prospects and challenges ahead in the attainment of SDG-5. And finally we will conclude this.

**Sustainable
Development and
Women
Empowerment**

As far as our study area is concerned, first we have to be familiar with both the concepts of Sustainable Development and Women Empowerment. The term Sustainable Development is of recent origin. First time in 1987, the concept of Sustainable Development was defined by Brundtland Commission in its report entitled 'Our Common Future'. As per this report- "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Later on, it has attracted the attention of all the policy makers across the world.

Development of a nation will only sustain if its natural and human resources did not deteriorate over the period. In this area a major step by the United Nations has been adopted during 2015, by setting 17 SDGs for its member nations. SDGs cover various Socio, Economic and Environmental aspects. As we are concerned to only SDG-5 i.e. gender equity and women empowerment. Development could not sustain without gender equity i.e. having no discrimination on gender basis. Gender parity can be achieved through empowering women.

Women Empowerment is a term that gets popular with the world wide awareness regarding the rights of women. Empowerment can be defined in several ways. Empowerment refers to a state when one uses its potential or recognizes itself or gets the ability to control its own s' action. So women empowerment means to give them power so they can play at par to men on socio- economic and political grounds. In other words, "Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities." (Hazarika, 2011)

**Major Initiatives
towards Women
Empowerment and
Gender Equity (Since
Independence)**

As per our study, we have to concentrate on the initiatives that are undertaken in accordance to achieve SDG-5 by our government. Prior to that we will briefly discuss the initiatives adopted by our government in this concerned area since Independence Women and their overall development have been a major concern to our policy makers. Some of them are given below:

In India, to politically empower the women, 73rd & 74th Amendments of the Constitution have embarked a historical change. As a result women are now actively participating in the grass root level polity. Women's right to Property Act 2005 provides legal entitlement towards inherited property to women. Due to the lack of property rights, women in our society no longer have ownership of inherited property. In rural area, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana(1999), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana(2001), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment and Guarantee Act (2006), National Rural Livelihood Mission(there-in-after NRLM) (2011) and a no of other schemes and provisions have been implemented for socio-economic development of women. In NRLM, no of Self Help Groups having female members have been constituted over the period. SHGs are awakening the sense of self-employment among rural women. In urban areas National Urban Livelihood Mission was launched during 2013 to promote self-employment, skilled wage employment opportunities.

National Literacy Mission (1988), the Constitutional provision to provide free education to 6 to 14 years old, many scholarships for girls and other specific provisions has contributed towards an increased literacy rate. Janni Suraksha Yojana (2005) has been implemented to tackle the health issues pertaining to pregnant women. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan yojana (2014) has been launched with a motive of financial inclusion. All should have their bank accounts. Through bank accounts female members of a family can collect their tiny savings.

Present Scenario towards SDG-5

Present scenario of the government is to develop the perception of self-dependence among the women. "More generally, economic development alone will probably not be enough to bring about equality between women and men in the foreseeable future and policies will be required to accelerate this process." (Duflo, 2012) Recently the Indian Government has implemented different schemes for achieving gender equality. And steps have been adopted towards to combat all forms of discrimination and violence against women in our country. Some of them are discussed below:

Census 2011 reveals that sex ratio has accelerated i.e. 943 per 1000 females over the last census. But child sex ratio (0-6 years) has deteriorated i.e. 919 per 1000 girls. Haryana, Punjab and some other states lies far away from the average child sex ratio. To combat this problem a scheme named Beti Bachao & Beti Padhao was launched on January 22, 2015. Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (2015) get started to promote savings by the parents of a girl child to secure her future.

Pradhan mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (2015) provides skill development opportunities for youths and by MUDRA (2015), collateral free loans were provided. Girls are also being benefited from these schemes. Stand up India was launched in April 2016, to promote entrepreneurship in greenfield areas among women and SC/ST.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched on May 1, 2016. Under this scheme free LPG connections were allotted to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. Health related problems arising due to smoke can be removed. Under Pradhanmantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMKVY) an amount of 6000 rupees to pregnant women was given to provide them financial assistance to compensate for wage loss during birth, for safe delivery and for the care of newborn etc. In this respect, National Nutrition Mission (NNM) - to attain 'Superhit Bharat' Was launched during 2017-18 to achieve different targets related to malnutrition, anaemic and low birth weights etc problems. Maternity leave and child care leave have been provided for the better upbringing of our next generation.

Women Helpline was introduced to provide protection against violence. Awareness regarding these help lines have been spreading through several ways. "One Stop Crisis Centres are being established across the country for providing integrated support to women affected by violence, in private and public spaces." (VNR, 2017)

Future prospects for SDG-5 in India or Challenges ahead

In this section we will concentrate on future prospects for SDG-5 in India. We will try to emphasise on the issues that should be tackled to attain women empowerment and gender parity. A number of legal and constitutional safeguards are provided to women from time to time in our country. But still - "Women are the victims of social, political, religious, and economic subordination and deprivation in Indian society. Also they are treated unequally and cannot participate in democratic activities equally with men. Democracy becomes meaningless and paralyzed unless fifty percent of its population participates in the democratic decision making processes and joins in the economic, social and political activities. Therefore to make democracy sustainable it is necessary that both women and men should take part in the development activities." (Mandal, 2013)

As per census 2011, literacy rate for females was 65.46%. It clearly depicts that illiteracy among women leads to their economic dependency on others. Government has taken no of initiatives in this area. Since independence, over the period literacy rate has improved a lot. Enrolment ratio on primary level has been significantly improved but in higher studies needs to be improved.

Woman's political participation, due to the reservation policy in the third tier, has significantly improved. But there is need to train the elected woman in a manner that she can utilise the powers enshrined to her. In the national level polity, women's representation is much lesser as compared to men. "The 17th Lok Sabha also has the highest number of women MPs. Women's representation has steadily increased in the Lok Sabha. In the first- ever election, only 5% of the House consisted of women. Now that has increased to 14%." (The Hindu, 2019) It clearly depicts that there is need for improvement in the concerned area.

As per VNR Report 2020, "380 million accounts opened so far under PMJDY, 54% were owned by women." It reveals great achievement in this particular area. But in rural and remote areas, financial literacy is much less as compared to urban areas. Financial literacy is must so that women can operate their accounts independently. And they can also mobilise more of their savings into accounts.

In recent times, the declining child sex ratio (0-6 years) is being major area of concern. To save the girl child, the government has adopted several good steps. Government

action will work at high speed, if there would be a change in the mindset of society. Due to orthodox nature, there has been a preference for a baby boy. But nowadays, due to enhanced literacy the social mindset is changing over this period. Hopefully we will find improved child sex ratio (0-6 years) in upcoming census.

Most of the women are indulged in the primary sector as compared to the secondary and tertiary sector. Women used to help in agriculture and allied activities. As VNR Report 2020 stated, "In rural India, while 75 percent of rural women workers are engaged in agriculture, women's operational land holding is only 13.96 per cent." Due to having less ownership on land, most of them do not have access to agriculture income. As a result they have a marginal role in decision making in the family.

The problem of discrimination and violence against women still persist. While government has taken several steps in the concerned area. Domestic violence, sexual harassment and discrimination at work place etc problems are still prevailing in our society. Women should be mentally or physically strong so that they can fight against these problems. From the above discussion it is clear that we have to concentrate on our present and upcoming generations of women. Rightly stated by Pande, "Today we have realized that to improve the position of women one needs to look at the girl child who is a woman of tomorrow. Only when we visualize a female child with high self esteem not merely in recipient roles but in active productive roles with a concern for human dignity then only we will have a strong and empowered woman." (Pande, 2017) And it is also true that if we take care of pregnant women, then the future generations of ours will be healthy. The problem of malnutrition, underweight born, etc. will not be there.

Conclusion

As we see, our government has adopted a number of initiatives to achieve SDG-5 i.e. achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. But due to lack of awareness, illiteracy and other social constraints among women, gender parity could not be achieved up to full extent. Till date, nine years are still there to achieve the set targets by the United Nations General Assembly. From the above discussion it is clear that India is progressive towards global commitments because women's position has improved a lot in different areas. But a far fight will go and India will achieve gender parity in all the spheres of life. Conclusively we can say that to empower women, education, employment opportunities, health facilities and skill development etc. can play a major role. Because due to all these, a sense of self-dependence can be enlightened among them. Self-dependency will confer women the power to break down all kinds of constraints against them.

References

1. *Why India needs to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on Gender Equality to launch into the Future*, India Today, April 2020, 17. www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/why-india-needs-to-achieve-the-unsustainable-goal-on-gender-equality-1668130-2020-04-17
2. Mandal, Keshab Chandra (2013), 'Concept and types of Women Empowerment', *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2pg- 17-30
3. Dufflo, Esther (2012), 'Women Empowerment and Economic Development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50 (4) { 1051-1079}
4. Pande, Rekha (2017), 'Some Issues and Challenges to Women's Development and Empowerment in India', *Feminist Research* 1(1), pg. 23-30, *Gatha Cognition*
5. Hazarika, Dhruva (2011), 'Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion', *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, Vol. 1, No 3, pg-199-202
6. *Voluntary National Review Report, On the Implementation Of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations High Level Political Forum 2017*
7. *New Lok Sabha has highest number of women MPs*, *The Hindu*, May 27, 2019 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/new-lok-sabha-has-highest-number-of-women-mps/article-27260506.ece>
8. *Voluntary National Review Report, On the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations High Level Political Forum 2020*
9. [Sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals)
10. [Censusindia.gov.in](http://censusindia.gov.in)
11. *The Economic Survey of India (2019-20)*, Ministry of Finance, GOI.