

Navigating and Surmounting Challenges in the Pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal's: Promoting Gender Equality in Indian Rural Areas

Vidhu Gupta, Basit Ali Bhat

Assistant Professor Department of Business Studies, Gulzar Group of Institutions, Khanna, Assistant Professor, Gulzar School of Management, Khanna

Abstract- Gender inequality remains a formidable obstacle to achieving sustainable development, particularly in rural settings. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) seeks to address gender inequality and empower women and girls worldwide. However, in rural areas, unique challenges hinder progress towards this goal. This conceptual paper delves into the barriers that perpetuate gender inequality in rural settings, explores their underlying causes, and identifies potential strategies for overcoming these barriers. By understanding and addressing these challenges, the paper implications would help policymakers, stakeholders, national & international agencies and communities to foster sustainable development and gender equality in India rural regions.

Keywords- Gender Equality, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Indian Rural Areas.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations (2002), equality serves as the cornerstone of every democratic society aspiring to achieve social justice and human rights. In addition to being a basic human right, gender equality is also a necessary condition for sustainable development (Sonowal, K., 2019). However, gender inequality remains a deeply ingrained issue prevalent in societies worldwide, undermining individuals' rights and potential and hindering progress towards sustainable development. The United Nations Women's CSW65 (2021)¹ theme, aimed at empowering women through improved participation and decision-making, represents a crucial step towards addressing these challenges. Policymakers and social scientists concur that implementing gender-based policies is vital for fostering gender equality (Hervías Parejo, V., Radulović, B., 2023; Duflo, 2012). Rohlinger et al. (2020) also emphasize that gender equality encompasses various aspects of society, including education, economic participation, and political involvement.

Promoting sustainable development and gender equality globally is the goal of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), one of the seventeen global goals of the United Nations. SDG 5 recognises the importance of gender equality in fostering peaceful, successful, and sustainable societies and aims to empower all women and girls by 2030. Gender inequality leads to disparities between men and women, affecting economic, social, health, educational, and political spheres (Iqbal A. et.al, 2022; Seguino, 2000; Gupta G. et.al, 2019). In order to achieve SDG 5, efforts are concentrated on eradicating gender-based violence and discrimination, guaranteeing equitable access to economic, healthcare, and educational opportunities, and encouraging women's involvement in decision-making.

In developing countries, gender inequality exposes women to vulnerabilities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage. Gender gaps in health and education result from differences in religious norms, civic liberties, and geographical classifications (U.N. Women, 2013). Gender norms and discriminatory behaviours are still prevalent in rural India, restricting women's access to economic opportunities, healthcare, education, and decision-making processes (Katiyar et al., 2022). The patriarchal structure in rural communities perpetuates gender-based violence and unequal power dynamics. This study investigates the challenges faced by rural women in Indian society, encompassing social, economic, political, and environmental aspects. The findings shed light on the complex realities experienced by Indian rural women, emphasizing the urgency of promoting gender equality for a just and sustainable future.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) serves as a catalyst for achieving gender equality which is not only an intrinsic human right but also a precondition for eradicating poverty, ensuring food security, improving health outcomes and promoting inclusive economic growth. Recognizing the critical importance of addressing gender equality, policymakers have incorporated it as a crucial component of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5) - a comprehensive framework consisting of seventeen interrelated goals aimed at fostering sustainable development worldwide (United Nations Development Programme. GOAL 5 TARGETS, 2017³).

This goal is a guiding light and holds immense relevance for rural India in addressing gender disparities, economic empowerment, health and well-being, education and skill development and political participation and decision making. The study aims to explore the

barriers that hinder the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) in Indian rural settings. By understanding and overcoming these barriers, the study seeks to contribute to the comprehensive goal of fostering gender equality and sustainable development in rural areas.

Rao (2017) presented that the industry also exhibits a notable underrepresentation of women. It becomes imperative to modify the governance system in order to enhance the status of both genders in developing countries (Tamuli, P.& Mishra,K, 2023). It has been demonstrated that in developing countries, women face greater deprivation. Disparities in health and education between genders can be attributed to variations in religious beliefs, civil liberties, and regional categorizations (Dollar and Gatti, 1990; U.N.Women, 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that achieving SDG 5 is a challenge in India and the crucial objective of gender equality demanded attention and concerted efforts (Katiyar, Rajesh & Parida, Ratri, 2022; Bhattacharya, A. & Pal, M., 2021). Women are disproportionately affected by illiteracy due to a higher chronicity of child marriages and poor utilisation of maternal health facilities, indicating a huge gender gap and necessitating tangible efforts in all areas.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a qualitative research design. The study gathers data from multiple sources, including academic journals, conference proceedings, news articles, and publications from national and international institutes. Additionally, primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews with 50 rural women aged 25 to 45, selected using convenience sampling. Researchers ensure informed consent and maintain confidentiality throughout the data collection process. The qualitative data is manually analysed using content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to gender equality challenges in Indian rural areas.

The combination of secondary and primary data enables a comprehensive exploration of gender equality challenges in Indian rural areas. While secondary sources provide a broader context and understanding of existing literature, the primary data obtained through interviews offers insights directly from the experiences and perspectives of rural women. Researchers acknowledge the limitations of convenience sampling, which may restrict the generalizability of findings, and remain vigilant about potential researcher bias.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Fig 1 (Source: Authors)

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, focused on gender equality, is vital for rural women across social, economic, environmental, and political spheres. Socially, breaking norms, ensuring education, healthcare, and addressing violence empowers women. Economically, access to resources and entrepreneurship reduces poverty and enhances development. Environmentally, women play key roles in conservation, their involvement promotes sustainability. Politically, increasing women's leadership fosters gender-responsive policies. Recognizing these connections enables transformative and inclusive development, benefiting society as a whole.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Argument: Gender Pay Gap Out of the 50 respondents, a significant 68% acknowledge the existence of a gender pay gap in India, where women are paid less for the same job compared to men. This data points to a pressing concern about income disparities and unequal

opportunities in the labor market. The findings corroborated the studies (Queisser, 2016; Agarwal et.al, 2021; &Patil, S &Kokate, K., 2017) who believed that gender disparities in wages persist, especially in non-agricultural occupations. This inequality not only affects the economic well-being of rural women but also highlights the need for measures to address gender-based wage discrimination.

Argument: Economic Decision-making within Families

A considerable 90% of rural women in India have not been involved in important economic decisions within their families. This finding underscores the prevailing gender disparities in domestic roles and financial decision-making and are also supported by literature (Gol, 2017; Agarwal, B. et.al, 2021). With only 14% feeling that their suggestions matter when it comes to taking money on credit or loans, it becomes evident that greater inclusion of women in financial matters within households is necessary to promote economic empowerment and independence.

Argument: Entrepreneurship Challenges

Entrepreneurship seems to offer promise for rural women, as 6% of respondents report involvement in some entrepreneurial activity. However, a significant 80% believe they can start a business on their own, but among them, 72% feel that their families would not support their decision to become entrepreneurs. Additionally, the underrepresentation of women founders in Indian start-ups highlights the need for gender balance in entrepreneurship (Fatima, 2019). This indicates that societal attitudes and lack of family support may hinder women's entrepreneurial ambitions, calling for initiatives that facilitate and encourage women's participation in business ventures (Fatima, 2019).

Argument: Importance of Female Education, Health and Violence

The unanimous agreement among all respondents (100%) on the importance of education for females highlights a growing awareness of the significance of education in empowering women. But % of women felt that there are no proper healthcare available to women in rural areas. Additionally, % women agreed that they were the victims of violence and % women showed unanimous consent on very less participation in household work by male counterparts. The findings were supported by the literature where it is found that violence against women is on the rise, correlating with a decline in the sex ratio at birth (Brahmapukar, K. et.al, 2017; BBC News⁶). This consensus underlines the need for continued efforts to promote and improve access to essential resources, information, assets, credit, education, and opportunities (Langer, A., et. al., 2015; Jain.P, &Agarwal,R., 2017; Selvan,A., 2017) for achieving gender equality and benefiting societies (Keddie, A., 2023 & K. Sankeetha, 2021).

Argument: Political Engagement

The majority of respondents (74%) reported participating in the last national elections as a voters, and an even higher percentage (86%) voted in the last Gram Panchayat elections. However, a significant portion (93%) feel they cannot participate in elections as candidates, with only 29% believing they can participate in Panchayat elections as candidates, and 91% believing they cannot participate in state or federal level elections. These findings are corroborated by the findings where it was found that family-centered politics and unequal bargaining power hinder women's involvement in politics (Prillaman A.S., 2023; Dubey, K.K.D.&Singh G.,2022; Kruks-Winsler, 2018; Robinson & Gottlieb, 2019 &Kaur, P. & Kaur, A., 2020). This data suggests a desire among rural women to engage in the democratic process, but barriers to their full political participation at higher levels should be addressed.

Argument: Environmental Decision-making

60% of respondents actively participate in community-level decisions related to environmental issues, demonstrating a sense of responsibility towards the environment. Nevertheless, nearly half (48%) still feel restricted by social norms or cultural practices limiting women's involvement in environmental decision-making. Also, The World Health Organization recognizes the significant role of women in climate adaptation and risk mitigation, including India (Mathilde, R et.al, (2023), This indicates the potential for fostering greater female participation in environmental initiatives through awareness and empowerment programs.

Argument: Need for Increased Awareness about Government Schemes

The survey findings reveal distinct levels of awareness regarding various government initiatives. Notably, 54% of respondents were familiar with schemes targeting economic empowerment, while awareness percentages for initiatives focused on women's political involvement and their inclusion in environmental decision-making were comparatively lower at 64% and 66%, respectively. This highlights the pressing need for more robust awareness campaigns to ensure that rural women can effectively utilize the array of government programs and prospects available to them such as the "One Stop Centre Scheme," the "POSH Act," "Mahila E-Haat," "STEP for Women," "National Rural Livelihood Mission," "Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)," and the "MAA (Mothers' Absolute

Affection) Programme for Infant and Young Child Feeding hold the potential to contribute significantly to the attainment of gender equality.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting gender equality in Indian rural areas requires a multifaceted approach that addresses socio-cultural norms, provides economic opportunities, encourages education, and enhances women's political and environmental participation. This entails making investments in technology and education, granting access to capital, and advocating for inclusive laws that combat discrimination based on gender and enable women to fully engage in all facets of rural life. By navigating and surmounting the challenges identified in this paper, policymakers, organizations, and society at large can work together to empower rural women and advance sustainable development, creating a more just and equal future for all.

VII. REFERENCES

- [1]. Agarwal, B., Anthwal, P. and Mahesh, M. (2021), "How many and which women own land in India? Inter-gender and intra-gender gaps", *The Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 57 No. 11, pp. 1-23.
- [2]. Bhattacharya, A., Pal, M. Fifth sustainable development goal gender equality in India: analysis by mathematics of uncertainty and covering of fuzzy graphs. *Neural Compute & Applied* **33**, 15027–15057 (2021). [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [3]. Brahmapurkar, K.P, et.al. Gender equality in India hit by illiteracy, child marriages and violence: a hurdle for sustainable development. *Pan African Medical Journal*. 2017; 28(178). [Doi: 10.11604/pamj.2017.28.178.13993]
- [4]. Dubey, K.K.D., Singh G. (2022). Role of Women in Politics and National Development. *NIU International Journal of Human Rights*, 8(3), 159-169. ISSN: 2394 – 0298
- [5]. Dufflo E.(2012). Women empowerment and economic development. *J. Econ. Lit.* 50(4):1051–1079. [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [6]. Fatima, Sana. (2019). *Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in India: An Exclusive Approach*, Women Empowerment and Emancipation, Delton Publishing House
- [7]. GoI. (2017). *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015 16*. Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [8]. Gupta G., Oomman N., Grown C., Conn K., Hawkes S., Shawar Y., et al.(2019). Gender equality and gender norms: framing the opportunities for health. *Lancet*. 393(1); 2550-2562
- [9]. Hervías Parejo, V., Radulović, B. (2023). Public Policies on Gender Equality. In: Vujadinović, D., Fröhlich, M., Giegerich, T. (eds) *Gender-Competent Legal Education*. Springer Textbooks in Law. Springer, Cham.
- [10]. Iqbal A, Hassan S, Mahmood H, Tanveer M.(2022). Gender equality, education, economic growth and religious tensions nexus in developing countries: A spatial analysis approach. *Heliyon*. 2022 Nov 3; 8(11):e11394. doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e11394. PMID: 36387490; PMCID: PMC9647361.
- [11]. Jain.P, & Agarwal, R. (2017). Women Education in rural India. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Volume-1, P.21-26.
- [12]. K.Sankeetha, Social Justice for Women in India, 3 (3) *IJLSI* Page 284 - 293 (2021)
- [13]. Katiyar, Rajesh & Parida, Ratri. (2022). Identification and Analysis of Critical Barriers for Achieving Sustainable Development in India. *Journal of Modelling in Management*. 18. 10.1108/JM2-11-2020-0288.
- [14]. Kaur, P. & Kaur A. (2020). Problems of rural working women: A literature review, *The Pharma Innovation Journal* 2020; 9(5): 261-264, ISSN (E): 2277- 7695.
- [15]. Keddie, Amanda. 2023. "Gender Equality Reform and Police Organizations: A Social Justice Approach." *Gender, Work & Organization* 30(3): 810–25.
- [16]. Kruks-Winsler, Gabrielle. 2018. *Claiming the state: Active citizenship and social welfare in rural India*. Cambridge University Press.
- [17]. Langer, A. et.al. (2015). Women and Health: the key for sustainable development. *The Lancet Commissions*. 386 (9999): 1165-1210.
- [18]. Mathilde, R, Christopher J. S. & Shonali, P. (2023). Gender equality and climate change mitigation: Are women a secret weapon? *Frontiers in Climate*. 5, ISSN=2624-9553 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fclim.2023.946712> DOI=10.3389/fclim.2023.946712
- [19]. Padmaja Tamuli, & Dr. Kaushik Mishra. (2023). Achieving Gender Equality through Women Empowerment in India: A Study in the Context of Sustainable Development. *Journal of Women Empowerment and Studies (JWES)* ISSN:2799-1253, 3(05), 29–39. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jwes.35.29.39>
- [20]. Patil, S.; Kokate, K. (2017). Identifying factors governing attitude of rural women towards Self-Help Groups using principal component analysis, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 55, 157-167, ISSN 0743-0167,

- [21]. Prillaman, S.A. (2023), Strength in Numbers: How Women's Groups Close India's Political Gender Gap. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67: 390-410.
- [22]. Queisser, M, Patrick Love (2016), "Gender equality and the sustainable development goals", in (Ed.), *OECD Insights - Debate the Issues: New Approaches to Economic Challenges*, OECD Publishing, Paris, doi: 10.1787/9789264264687-16-en.
- [23]. Robinson, Amanda Lea, and Jessica Gottlieb. (2019). How to Close the Gender Gap in Political Participation: Lessons from Matrilineal Societies in Africa." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(1): 68-92.
- [24]. Rohlinger D., Olsen A., Hewitt L.(2020). Dualing Discourse: democracy, gender equity, and discursive politics in rural Morocco. *Wom. Stud. Int. Forum*. 81(1):1–20. [Google Scholar]
- [25]. Selvan, A. (2017). Problems of rural girl students in higher educational institutions. *Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*, Volume-4/23.
- [26]. Sonowal, K. "Gender Equality for Sustainable Development in India- An Analytical Study" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 08, no. 2, 2019, pp. 67-70.
- [27]. Seguino, Stephanie. (2000). *Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis*, *World Development*. 28 (7),1211-1230, ISSN 0305-750X,
- [28]. U.N. Women. *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*; New York: 2013. *Annual Report (2011-12): Gender equality and Women's Empowerment*.