

Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Women must be empowered on the social, economic, and political fronts. Its goal is to empower women by giving them more autonomy and inner fortitude to make decisions about their lives, including decisions about resources and ideologies. The development strategy that aims to assist people, men and women alike, to lower their poverty level and raise their standard of living must include women's empowerment. Therefore, it is evident that empowerment is a matter of power, specifically the distribution of power among individuals and groups and power interactions. (Kahlon, 2004, S. Batliwala, 1994,7). To achieve sustainable development, it is crucial to manage the natural resource base that supports human activities. Sustainable development initiatives, however, are concerned about the socially constructed roles that men and women play, as well as the deprivation of women as an outcome of discrimination, gender-segregated work, and traditional attitudes. The study utilized the analysis of secondary data and information to investigate women empowerment issues in and throughout the various parts of Sustainable development. Bringing investment into the livelihoods of girls and women, supporting their particular requirements as workers, homemakers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and promoters of climate-resilient, low-emission establishing sustainable development and economies the framework that challenges the prejudiced societal customs and procedures that advance gender parity and attain more sustainable development. The investigation contributes to our understanding of the domains of sustainable development, environmental studies, women's rights, and gender studies where the advancement of planning and policy focused on gender responsiveness.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Sustainable development

Introduction:

“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”

-(Principle 20, RioDeclaration).

One of the main development objectives for sustainable development that is widely accepted worldwide is women's empowerment. Women perform important and varied responsibilities in the family, the workplace, and society, as homemakers, contributors to the welfare of society, and job seekers and employers, corresponding. Women empowerment is an essential component of development strategies that seek to empower men and women to reduce poverty by eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life. Since women constitute around 50% of the world's population, their position is crucial to national economies. Consequently, women need to participate in all areas of economic endeavour to reduce gender disparity and advance general economic expansion. This is crucial because a woman's economic

empowerment affects her children, her family, society, and the country as a whole. Moving away from unsustainable policy frameworks and toward ones that support sustainable production and consumption, safeguard the most vulnerable, and increase the ability of countries and communities to withstand environmental and socioeconomic risks, is a critical task for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. UNDP states that while there has been significant progress made toward many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the reduction of poverty, the decline in infant and child mortality, and the improvement of education, there are still disparities in several areas, including severe environmental degradation and economic crises, where gender-based inequality is seen as impeding progress toward many of the MDGs. Gender-sensitive growth strategies that prioritize women's empowerment are therefore essential to a holistic development approach that effectively contributes to economic development. The current state of women's affairs in India is defined by a complicated interaction between continuous obstacles and development. Considerable progress has been made in the areas of women's empowerment and gender equality. However, gender inequality persists in India due to deeply ingrained cultural norms, economic inequalities, and political obstacles.

Objectives of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the aspects of women empowerment and sustainability as a whole in order to determine how much gender equality can contribute to sustainable development in India.

Methodology:

The paper builds its case using secondary sources, including reviews of previously published works in journals, books, reports from various NGOs, government agencies, and websites that feature content from these and other international organizations.

The concept of Empowerment and Women Empowerment:

Empowerment is a multifaceted societal process that supports individuals in assuming responsibility for their own life. Through taking action on issues that they perceive crucial, it is a process that empowers people with power—that is, the ability to implement—for use in their own lives, communities, and society. Women empowered means who have greater authority and influence over their own lives. This refers to the notion that women continue to be at a disadvantage to men in a variety of sociocultural, political, and economic contexts. The idea that "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female" is what gender equality is all about, therefore empowering women may also be considered as a crucial step in achieving that goal. The UN Population Fund states that a woman who is empowered feels good about herself. She is liberated to make her own decisions and has access to resources and opportunities that give her a wide range of possibilities to choose from. She is in accountable for her own life, both within and outside the home, and she may shape societal change to establish a more equitable social and economic structure on a national and worldwide scale. Law, education, politics, and the economy all play a part in institutionalizing gender norms. Before gender equality is achieved and maintained, women must be "empowered" in order to close the "gender gap" and level the playing field with men.

The concept of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (IISD). As a result, it meets the needs of every individual. It is impossible to attain intragenerational parity without addressing the gender dynamics that underpin the existing inequality. If disparities persist, neither intergenerational fairness nor the obligation to leave behind a more equitable environment for future generations can be fulfilled. One of the most prevalent forms of inequality in the world is gender inequality, and sustainable development is impossible to achieve without taking significant action to address it.

Three interconnected pillars are considered to support sustainable development: environmental protection, social development, and economic development. The preservation of cultural diversity has been suggested as the fourth pillar. This conceptual classification could result in treating these topics separately and failing to take into consideration the multitude of ways that these pillars interact and promote sustainable development. Instead, sustainable development can be seen as a complex and dynamic process by adopting an integrated and holistic approach to socio-culturally conscious, ecologically friendly economic development. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be seen as cross-cutting issues in economic, sociocultural, and environmental development rather than only being social development concerns. The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as progress that satisfies current demands without undermining the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs.

Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development:

Women's empowerment is a process, and sustainable development incorporates an enormous variety of sociocultural, economic, and environmental factors. Gender issues have mostly been addressed as social issues up until now. The Millennium Development Goals' emphasis on health care, education, and poverty alleviation reflects this. In order to include gender equality and women's empowerment in democratic governance, poverty alleviation, crisis prevention and recovery, environmental sustainability, and sustainable development, UNDP coordinates national and international initiatives in these areas. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also referred to as the Global Goals, are an international initiative to guarantee that everyone lives in peace and prosperity, end poverty, and safeguard the environment.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) prioritizes gender equality and women's empowerment as human rights and as a means of attaining the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development. The accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals are expanded upon in the 17 goals, which also include additional focus areas such as innovation, sustainable consumerism, economic inequality, peace and justice, and climate change. The objectives are related; frequently, resolving problems that are more frequently linked to one will be necessary for success on the other. In order to enhance life now and in a sustainable manner for future generations, the SDGs encourage cooperation and pragmatism.

They propose specific recommendations and objectives that all nations can implement in line with their own interests and global environmental concerns. The agenda of the SDGs is inclusive. They address the underlying causes of poverty and bring people together to transform the world for the better. "The UNDP places great emphasis on supporting the 2030 Agenda," stated UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. "The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer us a shared agenda and strategy to address some of the most important issues confronting our globe, like poverty, climate change, and conflict. UNDP is equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to spur development and assist nations in pursuing sustainable development."(UNDP)

Role of Women in Sustainable Development:

Women's empowerment will guarantee improved nutrition and health care for their entire family. This suggests that granting women equal access to work, education, credit, and property will guarantee everyone's economic sustainability. Women are more capable and motivated to take on new and challenging tasks at higher levels, along with the passion to perform properly, when they are empowered through business and investment.

The involvement of women is essential to sustainable development. Achieving social cohesion, economic progress, and environmental balance all depend on it. In order to achieve sustainable social, economic, and environmental development, women's empowerment is essential. Women with education support overall social growth, good health and cleanliness, and financial independence for their families. International recognition is granted to women who play an equal part in environmental management and conservation. Women's contributions to ocean and marine resource conservation and sustainable use are especially crucial for achieving SDG 14. The involvement of women in sustainable development is necessary to attain social equity, gender parity, and inclusive economic growth.

Economic Sustainability:

When women have equitable access to jobs, finance, education, and property, their families benefit from improved nutrition and health care, and the economy is more resilient. In order to maintain economic sustainability, women are essential because they greatly contribute to :

Workforce Participation: Women's participation in the workforce lowers poverty, boosts productivity, and propels economic progress.

Entrepreneurship: Female entrepreneurs boost GDP growth, foster innovation, and generate jobs

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): Women-owned SMEs provide sustainability, resilience, and local economic growth.

Agricultural Production: Women's participation in agriculture promotes rural development, enhances livelihoods, and guarantees food security.

Financial Inclusion: Women are empowered to save, invest, and manage risk when they have access to financial services and resources.

Women have important roles in economic sustainability, which we can support and acknowledge. By empowering women, we can attain sustainable development goals, advance gender equality and empowerment, strengthen economic growth and stability;

Social Sustainability:

Social integration depends on women's involvement in sustainable development. Women play a vital role in social development, contributing significantly to the betterment of society in social change, cultural preservation and promotion, and social cohesion. In order to maintain social sustainability, women must:

- Encouraging gender parity and questioning prejudiced practices.
- Promoting social cohesiveness and community involvement.
- Promoting inclusive procedures for making decisions.
- Assisting marginalized groups, including kids, the elderly, and people with impairments.
- Making contributions to programs aimed at reducing poverty, healthcare, and education.
- Promoting environmentally friendly practices and sustainable consumption habits.
- Increasing resilience and adjusting to the effects of climate change.

- Using leadership and mentoring to empower the next generation

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Environmental Sustainability:

Women contribute to sustainable practices, conservation, and environmental protection. Women engage in eco-friendly farming practices, preserving biodiversity and promoting food security. Women are vital to the preservation of the environment because they make major contributions to:

- **Conservation and Management of Natural Resources:** Women are important contributors to sustainable resource usage since they frequently oversee household resources.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** By using environmentally friendly farming methods, women protect biodiversity and advance food security.
- **Water Management:** Women are essential to attempts to save water because they usually supervise the gathering and use of water.
- **Garbage Management and Reduction:** Women are frequently in charge of organizing domestic garbage reduction, reuse, and recycling programs.
- **Environmental Change Adaptation and Mitigation:** Women have a crucial role in putting climate-resilient practices into action and adjusting to the effects of climate change.
- **Preservation of Biodiversity:** Women contribute to the maintenance of customs and traditional knowledge, safeguarding endangered species and habitats.
- **Environmental Education and Awareness:** Women inspire action and a shift in behaviour by educating and bringing attention to environmental issues.

By empowering women we can support sustainable development, advance gender equality, and improve environmental sustainability.

Women's empowerment towards sustainable development in India:

Increased gender equality can lead to higher economic output, better development results, and more representative institutions and policies. However, gender inequality needs to be addressed and corrective action must be taken in order to achieve total "society" growth in any economy, developed or developing. Under the motto of "Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav," India is commemorating the progressive 75 years since gaining its independence and advancing the goal of ensuring that women are "Empowered women-Empowered Nation." Gender equality, the eradication of poverty, and inclusive economic growth are all directly impacted by investments made in women's economic empowerment. Women contribute significantly to the economy through working in enterprises, on farms, as entrepreneurs, as employees, or as unpaid caregivers at home. However, they continue to be disproportionately impacted by exploitation, prejudice, and poverty (MOSPI).

In India, there are currently 432 million working-age women, 343 million of whom labor in the unorganized sector. According to a McKinsey Global Institute analysis, India's GDP would increase by US\$ 770 billion by 2025 only by providing equal opportunity for women. However, women's current GDP contribution is still under 18%.

Women are reaching new heights every day, even in rural India. Women have fought for their right to financial independence, started their own enterprises, and motivated others around them in spite of social and familial discrimination. Women are granted a 50% reservation in the panchayat system, and other government initiatives, such as the "National Rural Livelihood Mission," give them access to grassroots leadership positions. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Swachh Bharat Mission are two examples of government programs that have given women in the workforce access to supervisory positions. India currently has the third-largest unicorn community and the third-largest startup ecosystem globally. Only 10% of them, meanwhile, have had female founders in charge. It is imperative that greater financial and emotional assistance be mobilized to assist female entrepreneurs in getting off the ground. Thankfully, there has been a paradigm shift in the last few years regarding the process by which women start firms and rise to positions of business leadership.

Improving female employment prospects alone won't be enough to fully empower women economically; as important is relieving the stress of extra shifts for working women. The 3Rs approach—Recognizing, Reducing, and Redistributing the Unpaid Care Work Done by Women—needs to be implemented in all sectors of policymaking. One way to achieve this is to support women in their job as an investment in the infrastructure of public sector care. A mere 2% of India's GDP allocated by the government to the care economy has the potential to create 11 million employment and improve the economic and social well-being of women as they enter the formal workforce. In order to promote and assist women entrepreneurs in India, it is essential to implement laws that are both women-centric and women-friendly. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to make sure that major interventions—such as tax incentives—are implemented to facilitate better access to banks and other financial institutions. The CII National Committee on Women Empowerment focuses on gender equality, the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace, and women's empowerment at the community level. It collaborates with industry to enhance women's role and involvement in the economic realm and communal affairs. Additionally, CII established the yearly CII Woman Exemplar Award to recognize women who have contributed to development programs in the areas of microenterprises, health, education, and literacy. The Committee organizes conferences, seminars, workshops, and gender sensitization campaigns in addition to conducting recurring research on women's empowerment in the workplace in collaboration with partner organizations including the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

According to the most recent economic study for FY 2023–2024, women's labor force participation in India has increased significantly, signifying a major advancement in gender equality and empowerment. From just 23.3% in 2017–18, the female labor force participation rate (LFPR) exploded to 37% in 2022–2023; this remarkable increase was primarily fueled by rural women, who predominate in roles related to agriculture. In metropolitan regions, the percentage of women participating in the labor force rose from 22.7% to 25.6% between January and March of 2023 and January and March of 2024. During the same period, the proportion of female workers in urban areas rose from 20.6% to 23.4% (LFPR). Still, India's female labor force participation rate is below the world average. This is partly due to the fact that a large number of Indian women are employed in precarious jobs, which are less likely to offer formal contracts and good working conditions.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to fundamental human rights and are essential to our progress toward a society that is more peaceful, progressive, and sustainable. The gender gap will inevitably change and close, and equal opportunities and representation for women are making this possible.

Conclusion:

Sustainable development fundamentally emphasizes good governance, which will be challenging to achieve until there is near gender parity, it is more of a political term.

Reconciling social, environmental, and economic goals is necessary to achieve sustainable development. An explicit commitment to gender equality and the attainment of women's and girls' human rights and competencies must be included in all sustainable development policies and frameworks at the local, national, regional, and international levels. Women's collective action, equitable involvement in all policy-related decision-making, and the inclusion of women in more productive roles will undoubtedly accelerate the transition to sustainability in the social, economic, and environmental spheres. Since women make up half of the global population, they have gained greater advantages than men from the recent three decades of growth in social and economic development. However, because men continue to have a disproportionate amount of access to money and power, they remain overrepresented among the most disadvantaged populations in the globe. In addition to being a goal in and of itself, gender equality is essential to social progress, environmental sustainability, and sustainable economic growth. To ensure that the interests of both men and women are taken into consideration when allocating resources, a sustainable path of growth can be reached by giving women and men equal possibilities, including in decision-making in all sorts of activities. Significant advancements were made in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) regarding the acknowledgement of women's contributions and their complete involvement in sustainable development. The Rio Declaration's Principle 20, which is cited at the beginning of this document, and Agenda 21's "Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development" both commit to improving the status of women. Ultimately, it can be concluded that issues pertaining to the economy, society, culture, and environment must be handled holistically and in an integrated manner. From a gender perspective, it is especially crucial to treat gender equality as a cross-cutting goal to achieve sustainable development, rather than only viewing it as a socio-cultural issue. This includes giving gender equality fair consideration in the environmental and economic spheres. In India, women are significantly underrepresented in the informal economy, small company ownership, and agriculture. But doing so keeps women out of formal employment, which can be detrimental to socioeconomic well-being and gender parity. Empowering women is crucial for India's sustainable development since it can promote social cohesion, economic expansion, and environmental harmony. Governments should remove barriers that prevent mothers from working and offer additional incentives to boost the proportion of working-age women.

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