

## GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract.

*Gender equality refers to a society where all members, regardless of gender, have equal access to opportunities, rights, and services. This includes equal division of domestic tasks, equal wages for equal effort, equal education, and improved healthcare. Gender equality benefits society by promoting economic equality, fostering a diverse workplace, reducing poverty, and providing equal access to healthcare and education. It enhances productivity, health, and income for all, benefiting not only individuals but also society and contributing to global development. Gender equality is crucial for global sustainable development, empowering women at all levels. Despite challenges like lack of education, unequal access to opportunities, and poor health, it's essential to address these issues by government authorities, ensuring everyone can live together in society.*

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Development, Gender, Equality, Women Empowerment, Challenges.*

### Introduction

Every member of a society, regardless of gender, has equal access to all opportunities, rights, and services; therefore, that society is considered gender equality. The first place where gender equality is seen is in our house. It should be our home where all domestic tasks are divided equally among both genders, which may lessen the strain of caring for the entire family. Gender equality is exemplified by equal wages for equal effort. It implies that equal remuneration for equal labour should apply to all genders. In addition, there are several examples of gender equality, such as giving all people equal education and improved health care. There are numerous benefits come about for individuals in society as a result of gender equality. It produces several positive effects on society's citizens, such as economic equality, whereby equitable job possibilities foster a diversified workplace that raises productivity and lowers poverty. It also helps to provide equitable access to health care and education for men and women. It makes everyone, male or female, more productive, healthier, and able to make money according to their qualifications. It benefits not only the people but also the society they belong to, and gradually, it has become one of the reasons for

world development. Thus, establishing gender equality is essential to global sustainable development. It expanded the scope of the empowering process at all levels of women's life as a goal of the sustainable development programme. They are able to live with dignity and succeed in any endeavour. In spite all of this, they continuously face obstacles to empowerment, such as a lack of education, unequal access to opportunities, poor health, etc. It is imperative that these difficulties be brought to the attention of government authorities, who should then take stringent measures to address these challenges. Then, regardless of gender, only everyone can live together in society. From this vantage point, the paper mainly focuses on the role of gender equality in achieving sustainable development and how gender equality affects the life of women in various endeavours.

### **The concept of Sustainable development**

"Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is sustainable development. As a result, it meets the needs of both genders. It is impossible to attain intra-generational 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 interrelated pillars are considered to be the foundation of sustainable development: environmental protection, social development, and economic development. This conceptual classification could cause these topics to be treated separately without considering the numerous ways these pillars support one another and promote sustainable development. Instead, sustainable development can be seen as a complex and dynamic process that adopts an integrated and holistic approach to socio-culturally conscious, ecologically friendly economic development (Lohani & Aburaida, 2017).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to promote sustainable development and address the world's most pressing challenges. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted in 2000 and focused primarily on poverty reduction and social development. However, the SDGs are more comprehensive and address broader issues, including environmental sustainability, economic growth, and social inclusion. The SDGs aim to end poverty and hunger, promote sustainable economic growth, protect the environment, and promote social inclusion and gender equality. The SDGs will be achieved by 2030 and require collective action and commitment from governments, civil society and the private sector.

### **Role of Gender Equality in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

Achieving sustainable development requires equality between two sexes. Gender equality has been regarded as the fifth aim of the Sustainable Development Goals, which aims to raise

awareness that all people are equal, regardless of gender, and preserve the relevance and splendour of gender equality worldwide. It is the state in which all rights, opportunities, and privileges should not be affected by gender (Roser, 2023)

The UN has established 14 indicators and nine targets for SDG 5. The measures used by the global community to monitor the achievement of these targets are represented by these indicators and targets. All individuals and the society they are a part of benefit from it in terms of social, economic, and other areas of advancement. To give women the respect they deserve and to enable them to achieve it, Goal 5 also calls for the elimination of issues, including ownership rights, reproductive health concerns, and discrimination against women (Roser, 2023)

Gender equality still has a long way to go even now despite of all the advantages that made. Gender stereotypes are one of the existing issue that creates a negative impact on women's life. Women are still victims of sexual, emotional, and physical assault in many parts of the world. The lack of access to high quality education is one of the reasons for the obstruction that women and girl's empowerment and their inclusion in the general society face. Further more, they make less money in the workplace than men do (UN Women, 2023)

Thus, economic disparity is another major issue that keeps women from achieving their goals. Among the significant causes are the pre-existing patriarchal norms. It frequently lowers women's self-esteem. Women face male dominance in households, workplaces, and even politics as a result of these prevailing patriarchal norms. For women, it can be challenging when disparities based on sexual orientation, colour, class, or disabilities intersect. In this way, inadequate healthcare facilities also adversely impact women's lives. Problems are frequently caused by inadequate health care services, such as those related to maternity and reproductive health and disproportionality ( UN Women, 2023)

To establish a society where everyone is treated equally, we must undoubtedly address these problems. It is essential to report such issues to the authorities and take additional action to address them. This requires group action rather than being left to one person's discretion. Positive societal changes can only occur when we unite and combat discrimination. Women won't be able to live freely and with dignity unless they can talk about their issues.

### **Gender Equality Across All Sustainable Development Goals.**

A part of the sustainable development program mentions that equality among the genders is not just something that has to be achieved by 2030 but it is also advances all other goals related to sustainable development. Global development results from the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender parity. Achieving this aim results in a more inclusive and sustainable world.

The overarching objective of Sustainable Development goals is to promote women's empowerment. Since women outnumber men in the global population, enabling them to make economic gains contributes to the goal of ending poverty. Since it grants women access to all resources, it also contributes to achieving the second goal of Sustainable Development, which is

to end global hunger. The two primary goals of SDG can be accomplished when universal access to equitable health and education opportunities is achieved, regardless of gender. It empowers women to own their own businesses in order to strengthen them economically and socially. Additionally, it contributes to the realisation of universal equality. Reducing inequality both within and among nations also depends on gender equality. Our societies are more inclusive and resilient when women and men work together on peacebuilding, administration, and conflict resolution. Additionally, this leads to accomplishing sustainable Development objectives and opens the door to gender equality.

It is crucial to remember that gender equality transcends sustainable development aims. Reaching gender equality will have more potent effects on social cohesion, education, health care, and economic growth. Women empowered in leadership, entrepreneurship, and decision-making will hasten the transition to sustainable development while transforming the society in which they live.

Gender equality is a multifaceted subject and a goal. The sustainable development objectives recognise the importance of gender equality the empowerment of women as a whole results from accomplishing each goals of Sustainable Development Program. For everyone, it is an experienced reality. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that it is merely a goal. Despite all this, women are severely impacted by the issue of gender equality all over the world. Even if there are various initiatives made for integrating women into the mainstream of society throughout the years, the discrimination against them based on their gender remains a severe problem. Several issues, including poverty, a lack of opportunities, and the provision of equal and adequate education, cause women's lack of empowerment.

When men and women engage equally in different domains, like decision-making, entrepreneurship, and administration, our world becomes more reliable and inclusive. Besides this, it is the bringing forward of the gender equality that is, one of the objectives of sustainable development program. In order to make a positive change, gender equality must be incorporated into society in place of gender inequality. Otherwise, women will continue to be marginalised in society, and the aim of full empowerment will remain a fantasy.

### **Sustainable development and the role of women**

Women are those with a strong sense of self who can develop relationships, make adjustments over time, and have confidence in themselves. They possess various attributes, including tenderness, modesty, warmth, sweetness, gentleness, emotional support, and helpfulness. They are crucial to conserving, managing, and using our natural resources. Without the involvement of women, sustainable development is not possible. They hold the key to realising our sustainable growth. Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a worldwide roadmap for realising a more sustainable and better future for everybody, representing a comprehensive and ambitious framework for addressing the world's most pressing challenges by 2030. With 17 interrelated goals, the Sustainable Development Goals

aim to tackle the world's most critical issues today, such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, peace, and justice. Among these objectives, women's empowerment and gender equality are crucial cross-cutting themes and specific priorities for the agenda's overall success. Women's participation in sustainable development is essential for promoting broader societal advancement and gender parity. Women are essential to sustainable development since they comprise half the world's population. Their distinct viewpoints, duties, and talents can propel advancement in sustainability. The coming section explains how empowering women can accelerate economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, which are the three pillars of sustainable development.

### **Women's Role in Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability**

Empowering women economically is essential to reducing poverty. Women may contribute substantially to economic growth by accessing resources, education, and job opportunities. One essential element of economic progress is the involvement of women in the workforce. Research has indicated that augmenting the participation of women in the workforce can enhance economic growth and productivity. To promote innovation and economic diversification, women entrepreneurs are essential. Women establish and run enterprises, which boost local economies, add jobs, and introduce new goods and services. Providing female entrepreneurs with networks, training, and financial resources can help them succeed and create more resilient and inclusive economies. Since the 1970s, development specialists have been paying more attention to how development strategies and policies impact women. The focus has shifted in recent years to incorporate empowerment, improving women's well-being and decision-making capacity (Datta, 2003).

"Women's empowerment" refers to women's ability to control the outside world's social, political, and economic aspects. Empowering women is the next stage of economic growth. Numerous academics and researchers have demonstrated how significantly women's empowerment alters economic progress. Indian women have broken free from the long-standing chains of serfdom and male dominance. She has realised her worth and begun confidently and dignifiedly climbing the social advancement ladder. Today, In India, women are respected and accorded equal standing with males in all spheres of life, including the political, social, home, and educational spheres. Yet, as women make up most of the population, inspiring and encouraging them to engage in the activities is still necessary. To achieve this, women's empowerment must incorporate specific actions encouraging women to participate in the nation's economic development. The actual gender needs, such as women's income and material assets, must be the focus of development measures to improve women's empowerment and reduce poverty. Women's empowerment will begin with this intervention and progress to a certain degree (Bhoganadamet al., 2014).

The introduction of some new measures will accelerate the pace of increase in women's empowerment to a significant degree. The majority of Indian women mainly depend on

unorganised labour to make ends meet. Increased empowerment for women can lead to substantial opportunities for economic growth. Growth is expected if the informal sector is engaged in various jobs and activities. It has been demonstrated that there is a rise in female counsellors, groups, and enterprises(Bhoganadamet al.,2014).

In India, women perform multiple roles such as household tasks, wives, mothers, and producers of goods and services; nevertheless, their contribution to economic development has been overlooked. The most frequently mentioned issues were education, health, malnutrition, and repeated childbirth. India has experienced rapid growth, albeit not always fairly or inclusively. Our development model is still in its early stages, with many ingrained issues. The nation's most significant problem is the empowerment of women. Globally, women's education and empowerment have consistently been shown to be the driving force behind swift socio-economic development. Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment: Giving women more financial clout is proceeding erratically and slowly. Women are just as capable as males in the export industry and other jobs that pay well; the problem is that they don't always have access to technology, financing, or information. They need additional encouragement to overcome the initial barriers(Eswari,2019).

Households headed by women may not eat enough simply because women earn at lower levels and are less prepared to cope with crises. Nourishment is not just about the quantity of food but its quality. Food consumption inequalities contrast women's significant role in agricultural production. Yet their potential contribution to food security remains constrained by unequal access to land and other productive assets. Women stop hunger by supporting women's role in food security, the cornerstone of food production and utilisation. We provide training for women farmers and access to information and technology to help women achieve significantly higher agricultural productivity. Women also raise awareness among rural women and decision-makers alike on the need for legal changes to allow more equitable distribution of assets, such as land and credit. Along with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, Women has developed a non-formal educational curriculum to prevent violence against women and girls, which educators and youth leaders are being trained to deliver in more than a dozen countries. (United Nations entity for Gender equality and empowerment of Women).

Women must participate in leadership roles and decision-making processes to develop inclusive and fair policies. Women offer a variety of experiences and viewpoints to governance, which can result in more long-term and practical solutions. Encouraging women to take on political, economic, and social leadership roles can propel advancements towards every sustainable development objective.

The UN formally declared 1975 International Women's Year and recognised women's important role in the environment. The UNEP State of the 1988 Environment Report and books published for women and the Third World Environment ranked women's roles as the most important. Their assistance with environmental issues has grown more articulate. Numerous

organisations and women's groups have been actively involved in increasing environmental awareness. John Davidson presents women as nurturers and providers who rely on restoring the natural system to supply fuel, water, food, and shelter. In this worldwide environmental movement, women are crucial. They put into words ecological policies and programs that do not jeopardise people's health and well-being. They continue to struggle to raise living standards and safeguard the environment. They participate in and share accountability for home and environmental management tasks. Women are considered a "major group whose involvement is necessary to achieve sustainable development" at the Earth Summit. The Fourth World Conference on Women's Assistance in Beijing in September 1995 emphasised that women's equality, full participation, and empowerment form the cornerstone of rapid and sustainable development. This conference acknowledges that the goal of sustainable development policies will not be achieved if they exclude men and women who resemble them (Singh, 2022).

Women in poor nations who closely relate to the natural environment gather the resources required for everyday needs. They collect materials from dead trees, plants, and other natural resources from the forest without endangering the trees or the forest itself. Women also carry and gather water. They gather water for various uses, including drinking, washing, and domestic use. They are also in charge of choosing how to use the water and storing it. (Singh, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

The Sustainable Development Goals and women have a mutually beneficial relationship. Achieving the SDGs depends on gender equality and women's empowerment, and the SDGs themselves offer a framework for tackling the many issues that women confront. By recognizing and advancing the role of women in sustainable development, we can create more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable communities for all. Women primarily drive sustainable development. Achieving sustainable growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection requires their engagement in the economy, health, education, and decision-making processes. Targeted policies and actions that empower women can help them reach their full potential and pave the way for a more just and sustainable future for everybody. Recognizing and leveraging women's unique contributions is not only a matter of gender justice but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development.

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