

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY TOWARDS SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN INDIA: EXAMINING THE PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA



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Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals 2015 were adopted by United Nations calls for universal action to end poverty, protection of planet Earth, ensures people peace and prosperity by the end of 2030. An inclusive and equitable society is fostered with gender equality and women empowerment as fundamental principle of social sustainability. Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims at ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls through gender equality and empowerment. India's rich cultural and social diversity poses a challenge as well as opportunities in promotion of gender equality. The present study aims to study the concept of social sustainability and broadly about Sustainable Development Goals. The research aims to explore and examine India's progress in the attainment of SDG 5 specific to Gender Equality for Social Sustainability.

The present study also focuses on gender-responsive strategies and initiatives taken by Indian Policy makers to uplift the status of women and percolation of equality amongst them. It delves into the specific challenges faced by poor women like access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare and violence against them. The paper also looks into various barriers and societal norms that obstruct the path of full realization of gender equality. The present study highlights the progression and challenges in implementation of social sustainability and SDG in India. The outcome of the study leads to policy recommendations



and advocating efforts towards attainment of SDG 5 and social sustainability in India.

Keywords: *Social Sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, India, SDG 5.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The '2030 Agenda' was proposed by the world's leaders at a United Nations (UN) summit in September 2015, and it is a comprehensive plan for human and environmental prosperity that is broken down into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. It showcases both the scope and the ambition of the global action that is to be pursued. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the achievements of the 17 SDGs are linked to human and planetary prosperity, strengthening universal peace, greater freedom and promoting the eradication of poverty, discrimination and inequalities in all forms¹. In the collective journey of meeting the SDGs and the UN 2030 Agenda targets, countries and stakeholders will act in partnership² to take a transformative and inclusive path towards a resilient and sustainable future in economic, social and environmental terms.

Action in crucial sectors for human and planetary well-being is triggered by the 2030 Agenda's goals for the SDGs and related targets. These include³:

- (i) Human existence in prosperity, equality and a healthy environment,
- (ii) Planet conservation through timely climate action, sustainable production, consumption and management of natural resources,
- (iii) Economic, social and technological prosperity in a harmonious symbiosis with nature,
- (iv) Peaceful, just and inclusive societies and
- (v) Revived global partnership of countries, stakeholders and people.

SDG 5 – 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', reflects the ever-increasing efforts of the UN towards gender equality, earmarked with the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women

¹United Nations, Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015).

²W.Leal Filho, T.Wall et.al. "Relevance of International Partnerships in the Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals", 13(1) *Nature Communications* 613 (2022a). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-28230-x>.

³United Nations, Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015).



in 1946⁴ and the adoption of landmark agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979⁵, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995⁶, and the establishment of UN Women in 2010⁷. The important role of gender equality for socio-economic development is well highlighted in the UN publication “We the Peoples”⁸, emphasizing the untapped development potential due to social, economic and political inequalities arising from gender discrimination, deeply rooted and persistent in many developing and developed economies, related to access to decent work and equal pay, education, healthcare, resources, decision-making, among others⁹

Women are still more vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and underrepresentation in the political, economic, and business spheres¹⁰. The recognition of the important role of women in global, social, economic and environmental prosperity is clearly stated in paragraphs 236–243 of the ‘**Future We Want**’¹¹ and in the Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (2014). SDG5 brings forward issues of gender-based discrimination such as unpaid work, sexual and reproductive rights, and gender-

⁴United Nation, Women Commission on the Status of Women (2020a), *available at*: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>.

⁵OHCHR, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 (2020), *available at*: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>.

⁶United Nations, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, (1995) *available at*: https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf; United Nations, UN Creates New Structure for Empowerment of Women. United Nations press release. New York, 2 July 2010 (2010).

⁷ United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2013, A/RES/66/288 (2012), *available at*: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E.

⁸K. Annan, *We the peoples*, United Nations (2000).

⁹Z. Brixiová, T. Kangoye, & F. Tregenna, “Enterprising women in Southern Africa: When does land ownership matter?” 41 *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 37–51(2020); J. Connor, S. Madhavan, M. Mokashi, H. Amanuel, N.R. Johnson, L.E. Pace, & D. Bartz, “Health risks and outcomes that disproportionately affect women during the Covid-19 pandemic: A review” 266 *Social Science & Medicine* 113364 (2020), *available at*: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113364>.

¹⁰A. Milazzo, & M. Goldstein, “Governance and women’s economic and political participation: Power inequalities formal constraints and norms” 34(1) *The World Bank Research Observer* 34–64 (2019), *available at*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lky006>.

¹¹United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2013, A/RES/66/288 (2012), *available at*: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E.



based violence¹². The improvement of global well-being depends on the success of SDG5. Table 1 outlines the nine goals of SDG5 that strive to eliminate discrimination in all its forms. The goals for sustainable development (SD) are set by these benchmarks. Depending on whether the goals are global, regional, or national in scope, a different set of indicators will be used to track progress toward those goals.

The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women constitutes a fundamental component in the pursuit of social sustainability and inclusive development in a societal frame. It is a basic human right of individuals and a driving force for advancement across diversified domains. In Indian scenario, a nation characterized by a profound cultural legacy and a diverse population, the endeavor to achieve gender parity and foster the advancement of women has garnered considerable prominence in recent times. The present study advances the arguments related to obstacles in the path of achievement of gender equality and women empowerment and their significance in building sustainability in the society.¹³

The cultural, ethnic, and social differences in India, the world's second most populous country, are vast. All citizens of India, regardless of their gender, are guaranteed equal protection under the law by the Indian Constitution. However, the fight for gender equality is a never-ending struggle that is entangled with cultural norms, customary behaviors, and institutional barriers. The status of women in Indian society has improved greatly over the course of history. Despite these advancements, gender discrepancies continue to exist in many areas, including but not limited to formal education, paid job, political engagement, and access to healthcare. In India, women's liberties and their participation in the workforce have advanced significantly over the past several decades. In historically male-dominated fields, women have demonstrated that they are capable of extraordinary accomplishments, shattering stereotypes and forging new trails. Nevertheless, despite these significant advancements, women continue to confront a variety of complex obstacles, including gender-based violence, discriminatory behaviors, limited economic

¹²L. Hirsu, L. Hashemi, & Z. Quezada-Rayes, "SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls", *Jean Monnet Sustainable Development Goals Network Policy Brief Series*, RMIT University (2019), available at: <https://www.rmit.edu.au/content/dam/rmit/rmit-images/college-of-dsc-images/eu-centre/sdg-5-policy-brief.pdf>.

¹³United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Social Sustainability* (2021), available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/social-sustainability>.



opportunities, and limited authority in decision-making processes. For the sake of women's health and prosperity, as well as the long-term stability and growth of society as a whole, it is crucial that these issues be resolved and significant progress made toward the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women¹⁴.

This research aims to shed light on the successes and setbacks experienced by India's efforts to achieve gender equality and female empowerment. The exploration encompasses a range of dimensions, encompassing legislative measures, social initiatives, grassroots movements, and policy frameworks that have been enacted with the aim of advancing gender equality. Furthermore, it elucidates the enduring barriers and entrenched cultural norms that impede the achievement of genuine parity. Through an analysis of the experiences, accomplishments, and challenges faced by women in India, this investigation aims to cultivate a holistic comprehension of the intricate dynamics pertaining to gender parity and the empowerment of women within the Indian milieu.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in India is not only an issue of social justice but also a crucial need for sustainable development. By implementing policies that guarantee equal opportunities and rights for women, the nation may effectively leverage the complete range of capabilities possessed by its diverse population, thereby cultivating an atmosphere characterized by inclusivity, creativity, and advancement.¹⁵ This analysis of the advancements and obstacles in India provides a foundation for fostering well-informed dialogues and motivating collaborative endeavors aimed at establishing a society that is fair and environmentally viable for every individual.

2. A NOTION OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Social sustainability is defined as the capacity of a society to effectively address the current and future requirements of its constituents, thereby guaranteeing social welfare, fairness, and impartiality. The statement acknowledges that sustainable development covers not just environmental aspects but also social factors that play a crucial role in ensuring the enduring

¹⁴United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Goal 5: Gender Equality (2021), *available at*: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality>.

¹⁵United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Social Sustainability (2021), *available at*: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/social-sustainability>.



stability and prosperity of communities. The notion of social sustainability places emphasis on the significance of cultivating inclusive societies whereby every individual is afforded equitable access to resources, opportunities, and fundamental services. The concept incorporates various dimensions, including but not limited to human rights, social cohesiveness, social fairness, quality of life, and community resilience. The concept of social sustainability aims to tackle the structural obstacles and inequalities present in society, with the goal of creating a more fair and impartial global community¹⁶.

Social sustainability, in its essence, acknowledges the insufficiency of economic growth and environmental conservation in isolation for the attainment of genuine sustainable development. The statement recognizes the importance of social progress and well-being as integral elements of a sustainable society. It emphasizes that disregarding the social dimension can result in enduring ramifications, including but not limited to inequality, social unrest, and environmental damage.

2.1. Key Principles of Social Sustainability:

- **Equity and social justice:** These are central to the concept of social sustainability, which prioritizes the equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, and benefits throughout society. This approach aims to prevent the marginalization or exclusion of any individual or group. The objective of this initiative is to foster inclusive societies that facilitate the well-being of all individuals, while advocating for social justice, equal rights, and the elimination of discriminatory practices¹⁷.
- **Participatory Decision-Making:** Social sustainability encompasses the imperative of involving all stakeholders, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, in decision-making processes through active involvement and engagement. The statement acknowledges the significance of inclusive governance, community engagement, and collective efforts in tackling social issues and attaining sustainable results¹⁸.
- **Community Resilience:** The concept of community resilience pertains to the ability of communities to effectively respond, adapt, and recover

¹⁶ International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), *Social Sustainability* (2021), available at: <https://sdg.iisd.org/topics/social-sustainability/>

¹⁷ United Nations, *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*



from various shocks and pressures of a social, economic, and environmental nature. The primary objective of this initiative is to cultivate social capital, facilitate the development of robust social networks, and encourage the enhancement of community cohesiveness and solidarity¹⁹.

- Uplifting the standard of living and welfare of every individual and society as overall is one of the key elements of Social Sustainability. It encompasses access to education, healthcare, housing, cultural resources, and social services, recognizing that these factors are crucial for a sustainable and thriving society²⁰.
- Inter-generational Equity: Social sustainability considers the needs and rights of future generations, ensuring that present actions do not compromise the well-being and opportunities of future populations. It promotes responsible resource management, long-term planning, and sustainable practices to safeguard the social fabric for generations to come²¹.

3. Gender Equality And Sustainable Development Goals

Gender equality is not alone a basic human right of individuals, but also an essential element of long-term and viable progress. The United Nations has acknowledged the inherent significance of gender equality by designating it as an independent objective, namely Goal 5, inside the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals²². The advancement of gender equality is crucial not only to society as a whole, but also to the success of the other SDGs. This is due to its success in addressing the underlying causes of underdevelopment and removing the structural barriers that hamper progress in a variety of sustainable development areas²³. The United Nations officially

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰United Nations, *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015).

²¹World Commission on Environment and Development, “Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report)” (1987), *available at*: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

²²United Nations, *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015).

²³United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Social Sustainability* (2021), *available at*: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/social-sustainability>.



endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, providing a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges and promoting sustainable development in a unified and coordinated fashion. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” and it is a potent tool for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment as crucial parts of sustainable development.²⁴

3.1. Interconnection of SDGs and Gender Equality

- Actual elimination of poverty includes efforts to ensure women’s equality. Gendered poverty is because of discrimination based on gender and unequal access to resources and opportunity given. According to **U.N. Women Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (2021)** “the promotion of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women have the potential to mitigate poverty and foster inclusive economic growth.”²⁵
- The need of providing equal access to a quality education for girls and women is emphasized heavily in Goal 5 of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Individuals have a right to an education, but education is also a powerful tool for fostering empowerment, promoting economic participation, and improving health outcomes. By advocating for gender equality in the realm of education, countries have the potential to cultivate a cohort of empowered women who actively contribute to the pursuit of sustainable development²⁶.
- The promotion of gender equality is intricately connected to the enhancement of the health and well-being of women and girls. The objective of Goal 5 is to provide widespread availability of sexual and reproductive health services, encompassing family planning as well. The imperative components of sustainable development encompass the mitigation of gender-based violence, the reduction of maternal

²⁴United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Goal 5: Gender Equality (2021), available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality>.

²⁵United Nations Women, Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (2021), available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>.

²⁶International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Gender Equality and the SDGs (2021), available at: <https://sdg.iisd.org/topics/gender-equality>.

²⁷Ibid.



mortality rates, and the enhancement of healthcare accessibility²⁷.

- The attainment of inclusive and sustainable economic growth necessitates the presence of gender equality, as it plays a crucial role in fostering economic empowerment. Sustainable Development Goal 5 emphasizes the imperative of advancing gender equality by advocating for the equitable distribution of economic resources, facilitating women's access to financial services, and ensuring their rights to possess and govern land and other assets. The economic empowerment of women has the potential to yield various positive outcomes, including enhanced production, diminished poverty rates, and the promotion of greater societal equity²⁸.
- The correlation between gender equality and peace, justice, and robust institutions is significant. The need of building peaceful and just societies necessitate the prioritization of addressing gender-based violence, facilitating women's involvement in decision-making processes, and guaranteeing equitable access to justice²⁹.

4. RESULTS/FINDINGS: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL – 5 AND ITS KEY INDICATORS

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) focuses specifically on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls³⁰. It recognizes that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical driver for sustainable development. SDG 5 sets forth a range of targets and indicators to monitor progress and ensure the realization of gender equality across various dimensions³¹.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development³²

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰United Nations Statistics Division, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (2020), *available at*: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-05/>.

³¹United Nations Women, Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (2021), *available at*: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>.

³²United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (2021), *available at*: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

**Table 1** SDG5 Targets and Indicators from UN (2021)

Target	Indicators
5.1 End discrimination against women and girls	5.1.1 Legal frameworks for gender equality and non-discrimination
5.2 End all violence against and exploitation of women and girls	5.2.1 Violence against women from an intimate partner
5.3 Eliminate forced marriages and genital mutilation	5.3.1 Women married before age 15 or 18 5.3.2 Female genital mutilation/cutting
5.4 Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities	5.4.1 Time spent on unpaid domestic and care work
5.5 Ensure full participation in leadership and decision-making	5.5.1 Women in political positions 5.5.2 Women in managerial positions
5.6 Universal access to reproductive rights and health	5.6.1 Women's decision-making on contraceptive use and healthcare 5.6.2 Guarantee of equal access to sexual and reproductive health care
5.A Equal rights to economic resources, property ownership, and financial services	5.A.1 Female land rights or ownership 5.A.2 Equal rights to land ownership
5.B Promote empowerment of women through technology	5.B.1 Mobile telephone ownership
5.C Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality	5.C.1 Systems to track gender equality

Key Indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 5:

- The indicator of gender parity in education assesses the extent to which equal opportunities for girls and women to access and receive excellent education have been achieved. The metric monitors the proportion of females to males enrolled in primary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions, alongside the literacy rate among women between the ages of 15 and 24³³.
- The indicator of women's engagement in decision-making centers on the objective of enhancing women's involvement and prominence in political, economic, and public spheres. The metric assesses the ratio of female-held seats in national parliaments, along with the level of female representation in managerial roles throughout public and private sectors³⁴.

³³United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Goal 5: Gender Equality (2021) available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality>.

³⁴United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Social Sustainability (2021), available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/social-sustainability>.



- The objective of this indicator is to assess the advancement made in the efforts to confront and eradicate various manifestations of violence and detrimental customs targeting women and girls. The indicators encompassed in this framework consist of several factors, such as the incidence of intimate partner violence, the presence of harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation, and the existence of legal and policy measures aimed at safeguarding women from acts of violence³⁵.
- The indicator at hand pertains to the guarantee of widespread availability to sexual and reproductive health services, encompassing family planning, maternal healthcare, and the provision of contraception. The tracking of indicators such as the maternal mortality ratio, adolescent birth rate, and the accessibility of reproductive healthcare services is conducted³⁶.
- The indicator of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work acknowledges the significance of acknowledging and assigning value to the unpaid care and domestic work, which is primarily carried out by women. The metric assesses the ratio of females and males involved in unpaid household labor, together with the policies and endeavors aimed at offering assistance and acknowledgment for this type of employment³⁷.
- The objective of this indicator is to assess the advancement towards attaining equitable compensation for work of comparable worth and fostering the economic empowerment of women. The indicators encompassed in this analysis consist of the gender wage gap, the rate of women's labor force participation, and the proportion of women engaged in non-agricultural jobs, as reported by the World Bank³⁸.

5. DISCUSSION: SDGS PROGRESSION AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA

The primary objective of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) is to attain gender equality and enhance the empowerment of women and girls.

³⁵United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Goal 5: Gender Equality (2021), available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality>.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸United Nations Statistics Division, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (2020), available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-05/>.



In the Indian context, notable advancements have been achieved in the pursuit of this objective; nonetheless, numerous obstacles continue to endure. In order to address these issues and expedite advancements, it is imperative to undertake a collective endeavor that encompasses policy reforms, social efforts, and attitudinal changes³⁹.

5.1. SDGs Progression in India

- The Republic of India has made significant strides in reducing the disparity between genders in the realm of education and literacy. The enrollment of female students in basic and secondary educational institutions has witnessed a notable rise. Moreover, endeavors have been undertaken to tackle the obstacles hindering girls' access to education, exemplified by projects like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which aims to ensure education for everyone. Nevertheless, there are still obstacles that need to be overcome in order to guarantee a good standard of education and decrease the number of students who discontinue their studies, especially in the context of higher education⁴⁰.
- India has witnessed notable advancements in the realm of women's political representation. The 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India have been implemented to allocate reserved seats for women in local government bodies, namely in panchayats. As a consequence, there has been a notable rise in the involvement of women in grassroots activities and their influence in decision-making processes. However, women's presence in national and state-level legislatures remains relatively low⁴¹.
- Efforts to combat violence against women in India have witnessed a surge in enthusiasm. Legislative initiatives, such as the enactment of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in 2013, have been implemented with the aim of bolstering legal provisions pertaining to sexual offenses. Furthermore, endeavors such as the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

³⁹NITI Aayog, SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019-20 (2020) available at: https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/SDG-India-Index-2.0_27-Dec.pdf.

⁴⁰Ministry of Women and Child Development, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (2020) available at: https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Good%20Practice%20Document-2-3-20_2.pdf.

⁴¹PRS Legislative Research, Reservation for Women in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (1993), available at: <https://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/acts/amendment-acts-women-reservation-panchayats-and-urban-local-bodies>.



campaign are designed to tackle issues pertaining to gender-based violence and discrimination. Nevertheless, there are ongoing obstacles in the successful implementation and enforcement of legislation, the transformation of societal perspectives, and the guarantee of survivors' access to justice⁴².

- India has had notable advancements in the realm of women's economic empowerment, characterized by a rise in female labor force engagement and enhanced accessibility to financial services. Efforts such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (Financial Inclusion Program) and the Stand-Up India Scheme have been implemented with the objective of fostering women's entrepreneurship and facilitating financial inclusion. Nevertheless, the persistence of gender disparities in remuneration, occupational segregation, and restricted entry to formal job possibilities continues to pose substantial obstacles⁴³.

5.2. Indian Challenges in Attainment of SDGs:

- The persistence of entrenched gender norms: Conventional gender norms and stereotypes exert an enduring impact on social perceptions, constraining the options available to women and promoting the persistence of gender inequity. In order to attain permanent development, it is imperative to confront these deeply ingrained conventions and advocate for gender-sensitive indoctrination.
- The domain of women's health and well-being exhibits progress, however certain metrics, such as maternal mortality rates and accessibility to sexual and reproductive health services, necessitate more focus and intervention. Improving healthcare infrastructure, guaranteeing the provision of high-quality healthcare services, and effectively tackling cultural barriers are pivotal factors in promoting the well-being of women.
- The bridging of the digital divide holds significant importance in the context of women's empowerment, particularly with regards to technology. The issues that must be confronted include ensuring

⁴²Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* (2020) available at: https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Good%20Practice%20Document-2-3-20_2.pdf.

⁴³UN Women India, *Women's Economic Empowerment*, available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/india/economic-empowerment>. (Last visited on Sep 15, 2023)



access to technology, promoting digital literacy, and establishing a conducive climate that facilitates women's engagement in the digital realm.

- The concept of intersectionality, which encompasses the interconnectedness of various identities and lived experiences, holds significant relevance in the pursuit of gender equality. It is imperative to prioritize the unique requirements and obstacles encountered by marginalized populations, including Dalit women, tribal women, and LGBTQ+ individuals, in order to foster comprehensive advancement.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women play a key role in the attainment of social sustainability in India. Although substantial advancements have been achieved in diverse domains, including education, political participation, and the mitigation of violence targeting women, a number of obstacles persist. Gender equality is hindered by long-standing societal expectations, gaps in healthcare access, unequal economic opportunities, and inequities in technological access. In order to effectively tackle these difficulties and advance the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment, it is imperative to use a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Several recommendations have been proposed to enhance the existing state of affairs.

- i. Efforts should be consistently directed towards enhancing legislative measures and implementing policy reforms in order to effectively combat gender-based discrimination, violence, and economic inequities. This entails both the reinforcement of current laws and the introduction of new legislation. The establishment of an environment that fosters gender equality necessitates the critical task of guaranteeing the efficient implementation and enforcement of these laws. We need to focus on evaluation and monitoring part as well for having an effective system that supports social sustainability.
- ii. The enhancement of women's access to economic resources, financial services, and entrepreneurship opportunities should be the central emphasis of policies and programs aimed at empowering women economically. The promotion of labor policies that are responsive to gender, the reduction of wage discrepancies, and the addressing of occupational segregation have the potential to enhance women's economic empowerment.



- iii. Education and skill development: It is imperative to allocate resources towards enhancing the standard of education and mitigating gender inequalities in educational opportunities. The promotion of girls' enrollment and retention in educational institutions, along with the provision of skills training and the implementation of gender-sensitive education, can effectively empower women and enhance their range of opportunities.
- iv. Addressing health disparities is of utmost importance in ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare for women, encompassing essential services related to sexual and reproductive health. Enhancing the healthcare infrastructure, mitigating cultural obstacles, and fostering knowledge regarding women's health concerns are critical measures.
- v. The promotion of technology and digital inclusion plays a crucial role in addressing the digital gap, hence facilitating the active involvement of women in the digital sphere. There is a need to prioritize initiatives aimed at enhancing technological accessibility, implementing digital literacy programs, and establishing a secure and inclusive online space for women.
- vi. Engaging men and boys as allies and champions for gender equality is of utmost importance. The promotion of gender sensitization programs, the questioning of harmful gender stereotypes, and the cultivation of positive masculinity can play a significant role in developing a society that is more inclusive and equal.
- vii. Enhancing Data Collection and Monitoring: The reinforcement of data collection, analysis, and monitoring processes is crucial in order to effectively monitor advancements, identify areas of improvement, and provide a foundation for policymaking based on empirical facts. Enhancing the practice of data disaggregation via the lens of gender and intersectionality can yield a more comprehensive comprehension of the obstacles encountered by diverse cohorts of women.

By following the aforementioned recommendations and cultivating cooperative endeavors among governmental entities, civil society organizations, and private enterprises, India has the potential to achieve substantial advancements in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This progress would therefore contribute to the establishment of a socially sustainable and inclusive society.