

ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION

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The main aim of this paper is to highlight the major gender gaps in India based on the global gender gap index and role of the government to bridge these gaps. As we all know that the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Despite all measures taken by the state still there is wide gender gap in major public domain. Hence, it is argued that merely planning of policies/programmes and protective laws are not enough to bridge gender gap but there is a need for the proper implementation and faster dispersal of grievances and a comprehensive plan for inclusion of women in development processes. The paper is based on the analysis of secondary sources.

Introduction

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. In short gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context.

As far as the term gender gap is concerned, sociologically, a gender gap is seen as a disproportionate difference or disparity between the men and women in the society. The difference that exists between men and women in access to some social good or benefit based on gender. These differences between women and men are further reflected in the social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes.

The economists define the “gender gap” as systematic differences in the outcomes that men and women achieve in the labor market. These differences are seen in the percentages of men and women in the labor force, the types of occupations they choose, and their relative incomes or hourly wages. These economic gender gaps have been of interest to economists since the 1890s.

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In the workplace, gender gaps refer to job opportunities and salary differences. Statistics show that men often earn more for the same work than women. The difference may be a result of the fact that men have been at the top of their professions longer.

Looking around the world, obvious differences can be observed between men and women and while these differences do not always hold true, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity form in some way or another. However, the reason for this gender gap has long been a controversial topic and several theories have been offered to explain it. The questions usually revolve around whether these differences arise from biological or social means.

The theory, proposed by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman in their article "Doing Gender," suggests that gender is the outcome of social interactions rather than sex, which describes the physical differences between males and females. As people interact with one another, they are free to "create their social realities and identities" instead of being bound to biological expectations (105). According to this theory, gender is an action rather than a state of being. The "social role model" argues that the behaviors associated with these gender roles will disappear as women infiltrate the traditional male domain, the work force, and abandon traditional female activities, such as tending for children and the home. (Doing Gender, by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman. *Gender & Society*, June 1987 vol. 1, no. 2, 125-151.

Women Empowerment and Gender gap

In the existing literature, female 'empowerment' has been measured in terms of: (1) women's ownership of economic resources; (2) the legal institutions that establish divorce laws and inheritance rights (Agarwal 1994); (3) cultural or gender norms regarding marriage and divorce (Rahman and Rao 2004; Anderson and Eswaran 2009); and (4) human capital such as education that can influence mobilization of resources. Recent studies suggest that cultural and gender norms are primary determinants of both women's ownership and control over the utilization of economic resources (Jejeebhoy 1998; Anderson and Eswaran 2009). The literature on female agency, thus, is increasingly recognizing that the construction of an appropriate measure of women's authority should be guided by the institutions prevalent in a society (Quisumbing and Maluccio 2003; Anderson and Eswaran 2009).

What do we mean by the "feminist agenda" for reducing gender gap and empowering women? The observation of the theatre personality and social activist, Shabana Azmi, appropriately sums this up: "I believe men and women are different not better, nor worse. And the difference needs to be celebrated. For far too long, solutions of all problems have sought to be resolved from male point of view. One has to take women's perspective into account, since women think differently".

ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION1031

One has to recognize that women don't need patronage. They need supportive environment for elevating themselves and reducing the gender gap. In this context empowerment covers a large canvas where a woman is enabled to negotiate better space for herself in the family, society and polity. The ability of women to make decisions that affect the circumstances of their own lives is an essential aspect of empowerment. In other words, improving the decision making power in day-to-day activities could be another way to accelerate the process of women empowerment. For instance, countries that eliminate gender gaps in education, will accelerate progress towards eliminating hunger and will improve child and maternal health, as educated women and girls are better able to make informed choices about family planning, nutrition, health, and education. Hence, one of the most important steps countries can take to drive progress is to ensure and improve the political, economic and social rights and opportunities of women by providing equal opportunities to resources.

Though the Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, women's position in the country has not improved much. Women in India are still considered to be a burden for most families on account of dowry, wedding costs, education and healthcare. Even today, the preference is for sons over daughters. In 2011, there were 914 girls for 1,000 boys among children aged 6 years and this was supposed to be the most imbalanced gender ratio, since our country attained independence in 1947. The Hindu Succession Act of 2005 has given equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property for women, but even this law's enforcement is weak. Many women are still deprived of their rightful inheritance.

No nation, society or community can hold its head high and claim to be the part of civilized world if it condones the practice of discrimination against one half of the community. Continuing preference for boys in society, for the girl child the apathy continues, the child sex ratio in India has dropped to 914 females against 1,000 males, one of the lowest since Independence according to Census 2011.

As per the provisional data of Census 2011 recently, while the overall sex ratio had gone up by seven points to touch 940, against 933 in Census 2001, the child sex ratio plummeted to 914 from 927. Sex ratio is the number of women against 1,000 men, while child sex ratio is the number of girls against 1,000 boys in the age group of 0-6.

Gender gap Index: the case of India in 2014

The Global Gender Gap Index, introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress. The Index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education- and health based criteria, and provide country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups, and over time.

The Gender Gap index quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracks their progress over time. Since there is no single measure to capture the complete situation, the Gender Gap Index seeks to measure one important aspect of gender equality and that is the relative gaps between men and women across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics.

1. Economic participation and opportunity – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment
2. Educational attainment – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education
3. Political empowerment – outcomes on representation in decision-making structures
4. Health and survival – outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio

The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they are dividing their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources and opportunities. World Economic Forum (WEF) on 28 October 2014 released the Global Gender Gap Report 2014. The 2014 report provides Gender Gap scores for 142 countries compared to 136 countries included in 2013 report. In the Report, India with a score of 0.646 has been ranked 114. In 2013, India was ranked 101 out of 136 countries. India ranks 123 in terms of economic participation, 121 in educational attainment, 134 in health and survival and 17 in political empowerment.

The recent report of World Economic Forum's 2014 gender gap index has clearly shown India's worsening gender gap. India holds the 114 rank out of the 142 countries surveyed. India experienced a drop [in absolute and relative value] on the health and survival sub-index compared with 2006, mainly due to a decrease in the female-to-male sex ratio at birth. In 2014, it also performed below average on the Economic Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment sub-indexes. In spite of India's progress in economic development, the rank has slipped by 13 positions, when its rank was 101 last year. The report has also shown that India's performance is below average and is one of the 20 worst performing countries in terms of economic participation, educational attainment, estimated income, labour force participation, health, survival and sex ratio. On economic participation and opportunity, India ranks 134, while on educational attainment it ranks 126. But on the health and survival parameter India's rank is among the lowest at 142. On the other hand, the same report has mentioned that in terms of the political empowerment sub-index, India is among the top 20 best-performing countries. The low sex ratio at birth gives the country its overall 114th rank, which makes it the lowest-ranked BRICS nation. The alarming fact is that India is one of the few countries where female labour force participation is shrinking. A staggering difference of 300 exists between Indian men and women in case of average minutes/

ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION1033

day spent on unpaid work – the highest difference among the 142 countries surveyed. In manual ploughing operations, women earned Rs55/day compared to men's Rs103/day. As far as the rank of India and SAARC Countries in ascending order is concerned, it is: Bangladesh (68); Sri Lanka (79); Maldives (105); Nepal (112); India (114); Bhutan (120) and Pakistan (141).

However, India, with 1.3 million elected women representatives, has the largest number of women participating in local governance among the Asian countries, exceeding its own 33% reservation. A study of Indian local governments by Munshi and Rozenweig (2008) said that women in local government roles came out with better outcomes for communities in budgetary decisions and were more competent in procuring resources despite significantly lower education and labour market experience, so politically empowering women is a good thing.

In short in 2014 Global Gender Gap Report, India has been ranked 114 with a score of 0.646 registering a steady improvement of its overall score since 2010. However, there has been slight drop in 2014 due to a drop in scores on the Economic Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment sub index. Since 2006, India has experienced the largest decrease (in absolute and relative value) on its Health and Survival sub index score because of an important drop in its Sex ratio at birth score. In 2014, India is below average on three sub-index: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment and Health and Survival. In fact, it is the second-lowest performing country on Health and Survival, just ahead of Armenia. India is among the top twenty best-performing countries on the Political Empowerment sub-index. India is part of the twenty worst-performing countries on the Labour force participation, Estimated earned income, Literacy rate and Sex ratio at birth indicators. India is the highest-ranked country on the Years with female head of state (over the past 50 years) indicator. India has the highest difference between women and men on the average minutes spent per day on unpaid work—a difference of 300 minutes. It is also among the countries with the highest difference in the female and male percentage of total R&D personnel (FTE). India has one of the lowest percentages of firms with female participation in ownership.

Gender Gaps in Selected Sectors in India

In this section I would like to discuss briefly about the gender gaps with respect to education, health and economic sector.

Educational Sector: There a considerable rate of gap between male and female literacy rates in India. It has been estimated that at the current rate of progress, India will be able to attain universal literacy only until 2060. As per the census of 2011, an effective literacy rate for men was 82.14% whereas for women it was 65.46%. Though there has been seen a substantial increase in the number of literate women and this gap is narrowing, it still persists. Among such figures, there exists

a ray of hope as well. According to the 2011 census, since year 2011, 110 million additional women had become literate as compared to 107 men that means that the number of literate women is increasing. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001–2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing. Table 1. Children's school attendance? Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys' age 6-17 years are attending school. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1,000 boys.

<i>Census year</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Male-female gap in literacy rate</i>
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India-2011

Health Sector: Discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 943 women to 1,000 men (Census 2011) has been presented in table 2. This is attributed to the cultural bias in favour of male children, which results in the abortion of female foetuses. Other causes are the social neglect of women and girls, manifested in less access to nutrition and healthcare, and in high maternal mortality.

Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world, at 385-487 per 100,000 live births. Close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy.

India had closed 93% of its health gender gap, 84% of its education gap, 41% of its economic participation gap and 27% of its political empowerment gap according to the Global Gender Gap report 2009. From then it's been downhill as India slips 13 places from its last year's ranking of 101 with a drop (in absolute and relative value) on the health and survival index, compared with 2006. In stark comparison are some countries from even the Sub-Saharan region who have managed to close more than 80% of the Economic Participation and Opportunity Sub Index, 25 countries fully closing the gap in Educational Attainment and 8

ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION1035

countries – Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, France, Guyana, Latvia, Namibia and The Philippines – fully closing the gap on both the Health and Education Sub Index.

The plight of Indian rural women with hundreds dying each day at childbirth and thousands more with no primary health care access is reflected on India's rank of 141 on the Health and Survival Sub Index. The main criterion – a decrease in female to male ratio at birth

Economic Sector: Women, as half of the human capital of India, will need to be more efficiently integrated into the economy in order to boost India's long term competitive potential. The census does not accurately identify many activities as work that women actually do to enable their families to survive collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working on family land etc. Women also work in home-based industries, bidi and agarbatti-rolling, bangle-making, weaving, etc. They do not get social security benefits and are paid very low wages for this informal work. One-third of agricultural workers are women. On an average, their wages are 30% lower than men's wages. Women find it difficult to get credit from banking institutions because they are often unable to provide collateral. They get much smaller loan amounts even though their repayment record is much better than that of men. Women's right to land and other assets is weak. Though legislation has been introduced to ensure that women share equally in ancestral property, enforcing such rights in a patriarchal society requires resources that poor women may not have. The work participation rate and gender gaps have been presented in table3 .

TABLE: 3 WORK PARTICIPATION RATE AND GENDER GAP INDIA: 2001, 2011

<i>Residence</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>2001 %age</i>	<i>Gender gap</i>	<i>2011 %age</i>	<i>Gender gap</i>	<i>Change</i>
Total	Person	39.1	26.1	39.8	27.8	+0.7
	Male	51.7		53.3		+1.6
	Female	25.6		25.5		-0.1

Source: worked out based on Census Data

Empowering women: a way to bridge gender gap

A quiet revolution has been sweeping the Indian political landscape. However, economic empowerment may not have kept pace with political empowerment. When it comes to female labor force participation, gender disparities remain deeply entrenched. The 2012 World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index ranked India 123rd out of 135 countries on economic participation and opportunity (MABRUK KABIR 25TH FEBRUARY, 2013, THE WORLD BANK REPORT)

Female employment remains concentrated in industries related to sanitation, education, chemicals, and tobacco, while higher-value industries such as research and development, computers, and transport have the lowest rates of female participation. What explains these gender disparities? Is it poor infrastructure, limited education, and gender composition of the labor force and industries? Or is

it deficiencies in social and business networks and a low share of incumbent female entrepreneurs?

Ghani, Kerr, and O'Connell in their recent Economic Premise report explore the drivers behind female entrepreneurship in India. Basic demographic factors — population size, density, and literacy rates — certainly play a role. However, female ownership among existing businesses seems to be a stronger predictor of future female entry and entrepreneurship. There is strong evidence in favor of agglomeration and clustering effects, where higher female ownership of local businesses in related industries (similar labor needs, input-output markets) attracts new female entrants in greater numbers. Thus when it comes to addressing gap in women's economic participation, promoting gender networks may just have the biggest bang for the buck.

Infrastructure is another low-hanging fruit for policymakers. The lack of basic amenities affects women more than men, as women are often responsible for a larger share of time-consuming household activities. Better electricity and access to water and sanitation may reduce the burden of women in providing essential household inputs for their families, and allow for more time to be directed toward entrepreneurial activities.

Stringent labor regulations also stimulate female entrepreneurship. Several studies link labor regulations in Indian states to economic performance. These regulations may affect the gender balance of entrepreneurs by shifting activity into industries that female entrepreneurs tend to be more involved in, or influencing occupational decisions within the family.

As the 2012 World Development Report highlights, empowering half of the potential workforce has significant economic benefits beyond promoting gender equality. Building inclusive political institutions is important, but policymakers must expand economic voice alongside political voice. While achieving economic equality sometimes requires tough choices (such as progressive taxation), the opposite is true in the case of gender. Encouraging female entrepreneurship is a direct path to shared prosperity and a more dynamic, sustainable growth.

The Government of India along with the various States and Union Territories have initiated a number of programmes targeted to reduce gender gap/inequality and to increase women's empowerment over the 1989-2013 period. Some of these programmes are Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Poor women, Kishori Shakti Yojana, Swayamsidha Mahila Mandal Programme, Condensed Course of Education for Adult Women, Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women, Swawalamban Programme, Swashakti Project, Integrated Child Development Services, Balika Samridhhi Yojana, National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, Ladli Laxmi Yojana, and many more but as revealed

from the data on global gender gap, these initiatives seem to be inadequate. In recent years the government of India has launched other programmes also for women's empowerment.

A few of the Programs, Missions and special provision for women's empowerment being adopted by the Government of India have been discussed below.

(a) National Mission for Empowerment of Women India

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GOI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with a view to empower women socially, economically and educationally. The Mission aims to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments of Government of India as well as State Governments. The Mission utilises existing structural arrangements of participating Ministries wherever available and partners with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in implementation of activities. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Poorna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

Major Focus areas of the Mission

There major areas mentioned in the mission include access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women. Also coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12 along with promoting higher and Professional education for girls/women. Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development was another concern of the mission. Gender sensitization and dissemination of information as well as steps for prevent crime against women and creating a safe environment for women were the priority of the mission.

(b) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of India (2001)

The Policy was formulated in the year 2001 with an aim of bringing about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. There were nine major objectives of this policy :

(i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation (iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal

remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations

(c) Provisions under twelfth Five Year Plan of India

Economic empowerment and skill development

In the Twelfth Plan efforts have been made to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It will improve the conditions of self employed women. Focus will be on women's work force participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. Training of women as BPO employees, electronic technicians, electricians, plumbers, sales persons, auto drivers, taxi drivers, masons, and so on will be incorporated in the skill development programmes. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women.

Conclusion

Despite all measures for bridging gender gap the status of women in India is not improving in the major areas. So now the question remains what the government should do. The most recently published article on national employment trends in India show that the growth rate of employment has been negative for females. It is strange but true that India is presently at a unique position as it is the one among the fastest growing nations in the developing world. But, in spite of growth, and the Government's efforts to reduce gender gap in health, education and employment, the socio-economic inequalities and substantial gender gaps still persists.

To address this issue, we first need to understand the behavioural underpinnings of our society that drives people to act the way they do. Undoubtedly, deeper social and cultural factors play an important role in sustaining women's low status. These factors are also difficult to change in the short term. But are there other

ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION1039

factors, more within the control of policymakers, which can reset the gender imbalance in our society?

India has traditionally been “very backward” when it comes to social development and gender parameters. It is true that we do not lack government programmes, but the challenge lies in half-hearted implementation and corruption. A multi-pronged approach is needed. We have a lot of sexual violence today that is further widening the gender gap. There is also a wage gap at workplaces, so women who are employed aren’t necessarily economically empowered. Hence, what would be the way out?

Here is some ways to reduce the gender gap and to empower women to the access of rights and resources, government of India can promote. First of all, it is imperative to establish ways and processes for women’s equitable participation and equal representation at all levels of the public life and political process in each society or community. While deeper social and cultural factors may be responsible for women’s low status, some parents are not investing in their daughters because they do not see an economic value in doing so. By and creating more job opportunities for women will lead parents to keep their girls in school longer and make greater investments in their nutrition and health. This could be done by changing the mindset, raising awareness about existing job opportunities for women and by the creation of more jobs for women.

Women’s voice must be heard while formulating any programme and policy for their empowerment. Women’s potentials must be recognized and encouraged for skill development and employment. The women must be made aware of and realize their rights and entitlements as member of the community and as citizens. In the field of employment there is an urgent need for making women enable to earn beyond the traditional occupations and ensuring equal access to the labour market and security. Most importantly, elimination of violence against women by changing the social mindset needs to be the priority of the government and non-government agencies. Hence, the real challenges of inclusion of women, we are facing today is not the formulation of policies or programmes, but the unequal distribution of resources, inadequacy in implementation of the programmes and the mindset of a society that is systematically discriminated against women.

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