

South Asian Perspectives on Sustainable Development and Gender Equality



Editors

Mallika Joseph
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Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
and
Regional Center for Strategic Studies



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Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace

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Acknowledgements

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive integrated framework to address gender inequality in South Asia. The idea for this study – exploring the intersectionality of SDG 5 with other goals – emerged at the Regional Steering Group Meeting of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) – South Asia in 2019. WISCOMP took lead in conceptualising this study and is thankful for the inputs received from the GPPAC South Asia Gender Focal Points in shaping it. We are also particularly thankful to Ms Maja Vitas Majstoroviæ, Gender and Inclusivity Specialist at GPPAC for her valuable feedback on the study’s methodology.

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Introduction

A third of the world's poor live in South Asia, home to 860 million women. Until recently, it was considered the fastest-growing region globally and had worked hard to close the gender gap across all sectors quite significantly. Yet, it continues to have the second-largest gender gap globally, and it will take 71 years to close the gender gap in the region. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer an excellent integrated framework to adopt a holistic approach in achieving gender targets in the region. Most countries have progressed significantly in localising specific targets, and they have set up institutional mechanisms to monitor and report progress. Parallel civil society voluntary national reports and analysis continue to provide complementary and alternative analyses and narratives on integrated approaches to achieving gender equality through SDG 5 plus. However, South Asia is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. And this was before COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown, which has exacerbated pre-existing challenges and created new impediments to achieving gender equality in the region.

In India, the government has recognised that it has been underperforming on Goal 5. The same applies to most states of the region, the exceptions being Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, where performance has been relatively better. However, new and emerging challenges in these two states are also putting a strain on eliminating discrimination and violence against women. Abiding challenges on 'leaving no woman or girl behind' and documenting how marginalisation is experienced is an unfinished agenda for South Asia.

Through this publication, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) and Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict – South Asia (GPPAC- South Asia) aim to draw the attention of policymakers and the various stakeholders to priority setting and silences, if any, in the national SDG achievement plans and strategies of the South Asian countries. The purpose of this publication is to provide opportunities for civil society actors to link up with other stakeholders to communicate, exchange ideas and jointly develop knowledge on the progress being made

on gender equality in the South Asian region. It seeks to enhance civil society capacity to identify gaps between the state's international commitments and national level policies on gender equality. In turn, this knowledge could be used to draw public attention towards relevant and strategic policy changes and strengthen the voice of women's groups.

In undertaking this study, the authors use SDG 5 as an entry point to explore SDG 16 and other SDGs where the footprint of CSOs is relatively limited. The study also explores the interconnectedness of the SDGs and the intersections between SDG 5 and other SDGs. More importantly, by establishing context-specific interconnectedness between Goal 5 and other goals, the study offers concrete recommendations to relevant actors on how to adopt a comprehensive implementation plan moving away from working in silos.

Each country report was drafted by a GPPAC South Asia member residing in the country. Since, GPPAC-South Asia currently does not have members from Bhutan and Maldives, the publication focuses on the SDG 5+ progress in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It is a qualitative analysis based on desk research, followed by interviews with specific subject experts and policymakers. Each country report explores the interconnectedness between SDG 5 and another SDG of relevance to the country. The study examined critical questions on whether the SDGs were government-owned or people-owned and whether it was an "all of government" exercise, or restricted only to specific ministries and departments. Specific questions also sought to explore whether the SDGs implementation was an inclusive process involving CSOs and non-government actors. Due to COVID 19, validation meetings among various stakeholders were not possible. Instead, each author sought their own way of validating their work - through email consultations with their peers and other stakeholders. This study has built GPPAC-South Asia members' capacity to identify the gaps in SDG implementation in their respective countries. It is a big first step that can provide opportunities for them to engage specifically with their respective governments. It provides the members to move beyond general engagement on SDGs to more specific conversations, as they are now aware of the level of localisation of targets and indicators that are happening (or not happening) in their respective countries.

This study was path-breaking because of its approach and methodology. It is the first study in the region that has brought out the interconnectedness of the SDGs, intersecting SDG 5 with one other SDGs. For instance, the

authors from Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, chose to study the intersections between SGG 5 and SDG 16 on peace and justice.

The Afghanistan report, written by Laulima Nasiri, argues that the rule of law plays a critical part in recognising and implementing women's rights. SDG 16 is not only important as a goal by itself, it is critically relevant to other goals as a robust legal and justice environment is both a driver and outcome of sustainable development. The report flags the challenges that confront the implementation of SDGs 5 and 16. These include the existence of societal norms and attitudes towards gender equality, low level of awareness about rights, increase in insecurity and violence, absence of or weak government control on rural areas in the country, lack of accountability and transparency within government and non-governmental organisations and the private sector, ethnicity-based favouritism, women's economic dependency, lack of strong political will and the sense of ownership, and lack of robust mechanisms for attracting financial resources. According to the authors, women's presence in all spheres of life with equal opportunities will help increase the knowledge and understanding of the rights and obligations before law among the population, which would facilitate peace and access to justice.

A similar narrative is evident in the Bangladesh report written by Ashish Banik. He makes a compelling argument on the challenges women confront in the country in reframing their narrative and redesigning the gender agenda. Some of these challenges include over politicisation and partisan outlook, drastic fall in the quality of governance, impunity and unavailability of timely justice, along with lax or practically little implementation of the existing laws and regulations. In this context, he identifies SDG 16 as a transformative goal that contains a range of cross-cutting issues essential for building a just, democratic, inclusive and sustainable society. This, he argues, will address structural drivers of discrimination and marginalisation that stand in the way of women's dignity, honour and participation in society.

In the Nepal report, Surabhi Singh argues that all efforts put into securing and promoting women and girls' interests are in vain in the absence of accountable state institutions, unbiased law enforcement, an independent judiciary, and a corruption-free stable political environment. Women and girls are at most risk for exploitation, sexual violence, unfair economic practices, trafficking, and other societal distress inflicted through discriminatory social practices. Prevalence of such atrocities is more

common in post-conflict countries like Nepal, highlighting the importance of achieving SDG 16 to achieve SDG 5.

For Pakistan, the study focused on SDG 5 and SDG 10 on inequality. In this chapter, Arshi Saleem Hashimi posits that social and economic disparity between genders in a society leads to extreme inequality affecting overall growth. She argues that to reverse the process of growing inequality at all levels, the Pakistani government needs to shift its priorities towards a model premised on social justice, fairness and sustainability. To reduce inequality as enshrined in SDG 10, there is a need to focus on addressing gender equality and women empowerment (SDG 5). The policy focus should be on social acceptance of the significance of women's role in decision making and access to resources for health, education, economic opportunities and political participation.

In the Sri Lanka report, which explores the intersectionality of SDG 5 and SDG 1 on poverty, Swarna Sumanasekara highlights the importance of addressing poverty as a first step towards achieving gender equality. She recommends that the Sri Lankan government expand and strengthen the government poverty alleviation programs focusing on female poverty while addressing structural issues obstructing women's economic participation. As seen and acknowledged globally, women's economic empowerment is fundamental in achieving the rest of the sustainable development goals.

Finally, in the India report, Mallika Joseph explores the intersectionality between SDG 4 on education and all gender-related targets. Not just the targets in SDG 5, but also SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 3 on health, SDG 6 on sanitation, SDG 8 on economic participation, and SDG 10 on inequalities. India has already adopted SDGs as the development framework and successfully localised the targets. It has gone a step further in taking the SDGs to the state, district and Gram Panchayat level (village level local body) to contextualise the indicators and encourage SDG budgeting. To that extent, India is way ahead of many countries in operationalising Agenda 2030, and it can serve as a model for other countries in the region. However, given the vast gender gap in all sectors and poor performance across all gender targets, the author recommends that India localises more gender-specific targets and indicators to expedite achieving SDG 5 on gender equality.

South Asian countries were struggling to meet their gender targets even before COVID-19. As a region, its gender gap is worst, second only to the MENA region. The region has one of the lowest female labour participation

rates globally, and an overwhelming majority of women are employed in the informal sector. Despite relatively higher percentages of women representation in political spaces (comparable to other regions), their collective bargaining power remains low. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities between men and women and among women. The future of 800 million women in the region is at stake if gender targets are not met. More than before, South Asian governments need to fast track the implementation of their gender targets and localise more indicators across all relevant targets.

This timely study aims to help policymakers address critical gaps that continue to exist in the realisation of SDG 5+ in the region and also serve as a locally-sourced context-specific advocacy tool for all stakeholders to lobby for an inclusive 'whole of society' approach when it comes to realising the sustainable development goals.

Policy Brief | Gender (In) Equality – SDG 5 plus in South Asia

Mallika Joseph

As Secretary-General, I see one overwhelming global injustice: gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls. Gender equality is fundamentally a question of power. We still live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture and have done so for millennia. Centuries of discrimination, deep-rooted patriarchy and misogyny have created a yawning gender power gap in our economies, our political systems and our corporations. This simply has to change.

UN Secretary-General, 9 March 2020

A third of the world's poor live in South Asia, home to 860 million women. Until recently, it was considered the fastest-growing region globally and had worked hard to close the gender gap across all sectors quite significantly. Yet, it continues to have the second largest gender gap in the world, and it will take 71 years to close the gender gap in the region. Across all gender-related global indices, the region continues to rank poorly compared to other regions. South Asia's female labour force participation rate is 28.3 percent, and reducing. Gender gaps in education have narrowed significantly, but literacy among women continue to be lower than men. The number of children, particularly girls, dropping out of school and not completing their secondary school education is simply too large to be ignored. Structural and actual violence against women widens the gender gap and increases inequalities between men and women, and among women.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer an excellent integrated framework to adopt a holistic approach in achieving gender targets in the region. Most countries have progressed significantly in localising specific targets, and they have set up institutional mechanisms to monitor and report progress. Parallel civil society voluntary national reports and analysis continue to provide complementary and alternative analyses and narratives

SOUTH ASIA'S RANKING IN GLOBAL GENDER INDICES

	HDI*	GDI**	Gender Inequality Index	Social Institutions and Gender Index	Global Gender Gap Index/153				
					Rank	Economic	Education	Political	Health
Afghanistan	169	0.660	0.655	Very High 53%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bangladesh	133	0.904	0.537	Very High 55%	50	141	120	7	119
India	131	0.820	0.488	Medium 34%	112	149	112	18	150
Nepal	142	0.933	0.452	Medium 36%	101	101	133	59	131
Pakistan	154	0.745	0.538	Very High 59%	151	150	143	93	149
Sri Lanka	72	0.955	0.401	High 43%	102	126	88	73	1

*Human Development Index, ** Gender Development Index

on integrated approaches to achieving gender equality through SDG 5 plus. The combination of SDGs that complement SDG 5 and best fit the South Asian context in achieving gender equality are SDG 1 on ending poverty, SDG 3 on health, SDG 4 on education, SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

However, South Asia is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. And this was before COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown, which has exacerbated pre-existing challenges and created new impediments to achieving gender equality in the region. The World Bank estimates a 7.7 percent contraction in regional economic growth, with India's economy, the largest in the region, set to shrink by 9.6 percent. Maldives will face the worst recession in its history, with its GDP set to contract by 19.5 percent.

Poverty and Inequality (SDG 1, SDG 10)

According to a UNDP study¹, South Asia's female poverty rate before the pandemic was 10 percent. It has now been revised to 13 percent. The UNDP has further revised the estimate for female poverty rate in 2030 from 15.8

percent to 18.6 percent² – 121 poor women for every 100 poor men. That's about 150 million women driven to poverty. The inequality is estimated to be more pronounced among women in the age group of 25-34 years. The economic lockdown triggered by the pandemic will increase poverty due to job losses, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups. In Bangladesh, the readymade garment sector, which employs about three million women, is the worst hit. A quarter of garment workers lost their jobs due to declining global orders during the pandemic.

Economic Participation (SDG 5)

In South Asia, women are already overrepresented in the informal sector and do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. About 92 percent³ of women in rural Bangladesh are employed in the informal sector. And even in the formal sector, women experience high levels of horizontal and vertical segregation and receive lower wages⁴. In India, for instance, women earn just one-fifth of male income. The region's gender gap in economic participation and opportunity stands lowest globally⁵, and women's economic prospects are minimal. In Pakistan, just about 32 percent of women have access to economic opportunities.

Education (SDG 4)

Another sector severely impacted due to COVID-19 is education. Education is the single most significant factor that determines the outcome of every gender-related programme. In India, three out of four trafficked persons are illiterate. The prevalence of child marriages and teenage pregnancies are higher among communities with little or no education. The economic cost of children out of school is equally alarming. According to the World Bank report on the impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector⁶, the lockdown across South Asia kept 391 million students out of school. A minimum of five months out of school and accompanying learning losses will have a lifetime impact on a generation of students' productivity. The report estimates that South Asia will lose \$622 to \$880 billion in future earnings due to the current learning losses triggered by the pandemic, subsequent lockdown and online learning. This does not take into account the enormous inequality created among students due to the lack of smartphones, laptops and internet for online classes. For instance, in India, just about 8 percent⁷ of students enrolled in government schools were using online classes. School closures will equally impact nutrition among children dependant on midday meal schemes.

Violence against Women (SDG 5, SDG 16)

Gender-based violence is endemic in South Asia. Intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of violence. On average, one in three women faces violence at home, though this percentage varies from country to country. For instance, in Bhutan, it is about 26 percent, while in Bangladesh, it is about 53 percent, and in Pakistan, it is as high as 85 percent⁸. A 2014 CARE study found that in Sri Lanka, 16 percent of surveyed women who experienced intimate partner violence took days off work, and 32 percent had to seek medical attention for their injuries.

In India, over 400,000 crimes against women were reported in 2019⁹, a third of which was perpetrated by the women's husbands and in-laws. One-fourth of those who experienced spousal violence sustained physical injury, including eye injuries, sprains, dislocations, broken bones, broken teeth or burns. Rape constituted 8 percent of all reported crimes against women, with 32,260 cases of rape registered. An almost equal number of 26,229 cases of child rapes were also registered in the same year. That's about three women and three children raped every hour. And these are just the reported cases of crime against women. Due to the social stigma attached to sexual offences, most of these cases are unreported or underreported.

Social practices and culture, patriarchy, and centuries-old traditions are responsible for the prevalence, perpetuation and persistence of structural violence against women and girls in all South Asian countries. For instance, in Pakistan and India, women continue to face 'honour' killings to preserve the family's honour. Pakistani activists claim there are about 1000 honour killings every year. Punjab accounts for the highest numbers of honour killings in Pakistan. In Nepal, gender inequality stems from deep-rooted social practices.

COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdown has increased violence against women worldwide. On the one hand, the factors that trigger violence like stress, restricted mobility, unemployment, job loss and financial instability have increased domestic violence incidents. On the other hand, it has also made help and assistance inaccessible to many women undergoing abuse. The Indian National Commission of Women registered twice the number of domestic violence cases at the beginning of the lockdown in March-April 2020 compared to earlier months. In a span of just 11 days during the lockdown due to COVID-19, the government helpline registered 92,000 child abuse cases¹⁰ in the family and the communities. In Bangladesh, there was a four-fold increase in the number of calls to women helplines.

Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

Given the enormity of the structural, physical and emotional violence that women suffer, South Asian governments must have accountable state institutions, an independent judiciary, gender-sensitive law enforcement agencies and a free and stable political environment. Only four countries in the region – Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – have laws prohibiting domestic violence. The conviction rate for crimes against women, particularly sexual offences, are extremely low in South Asia. In India, it dropped down from 27 percent in 2006 to 18.9 percent in 2016. In South Asia, women make less than five percent of the police force and less than 10 percent judges.

Political Participation and Leadership (SDG 5, SDG 10)

India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are among the top ten countries with most years with a women head of state in the past fifty years. However, women's representation in the parliament and cabinet in the region stands less than 20 percent. In Bangladesh, women constitute about 8 percent of the cabinet and 20 percent in the parliament. In India, the figure stands at 23 percent in the cabinet and 14 percent in parliament. At the last parliament and provincial council in Sri Lanka, women's representation was just about 5.2 and 3.9 percent. In comparison, Nepal has a better performance with 33.8 percent of women representatives in national parliament, 34.4 percent in provincial parliaments and 40.75 percent in local government bodies. Only ten percent of women occupy high positions within the government in Sri Lanka in other leadership positions. The ratio of men-women at the highest decision-making level stands at 6:1. In Bangladesh, women occupy just about ten percent of leadership roles in the corporate world.

Women's low representation in political, economic and security decision-making levels impedes their uninhibited participation in social dialogue, collective bargaining and policy development.

Recommendations

Since the adoption of the SDGs, South Asian countries have made significant progress in achieving the targets. Most countries have adopted a consultative process engaging various stakeholders across different sectors. Almost all countries have designated SDG focal points responsible for collating all data relating to SDGs, and some have developed integrated indicator frameworks and online monitoring dashboards. While some countries like India have attempted to develop country-specific indicators

to reflect local realities better, few others have adapted suggested global indicators for the various targets. Existing developmental plans, programs, and schemes are being aligned with the SDG targets, and SDG budgeting is visible in some countries.

However, all countries continue to lag in their progress on achieving gender-related targets. In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the progress has been stagnating or increasing at less than fifty percent of the required rate. In Nepal, where the performance is much better than the other South Asian countries, the score is moderately improving, yet it is insufficient to attain the goal by 2030.

Most of the countries have limited their indicators to globally suggested targets. ***Governments in South Asia need to go beyond and adopt context-specific additional indicators for crime and violence against women.*** For instance, the target for violence against women is limited to capturing only spousal violence/intimate partner violence. Other crimes against women like rape, honour killings, acid attacks or trafficking have been left out. They come under a general category of crimes against women per 100,000 population. This generalised categorisation is woefully inadequate to acknowledge and address the gender-specific crimes that women suffer.

There is an urgent need for the South Asian governments to develop additional gender-specific indicators for all relevant goals and targets, apart from SDG 5. For instance, India introduced an additional indicator on increasing institutional deliveries to reduce maternal mortality. ***South Asian governments should establish a committee of experts from civil society organisations and networks to help mainstream gender in all relevant targets and goals and develop gender-specific indicators.***

SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES SDG RANKING

	SDG* Rank/ 193	SDG Score
Afghanistan	139	54.2
Bangladesh	109	63.5
India	117	61.9
Nepal	96	65.9
Pakistan	134	56.2
Sri Lanka	94	66.9

*Sustainable Development Report

There is immense scope to expand gender-specific indicators under SDG 4 on education. For instance, in India, no schooling or less than five years of schooling is the common factor among girls who suffer child marriages, teenage pregnancies and adolescent motherhood. They are also exposed to a higher incidence of spousal violence, higher incidence of crime against women, and high levels of child and women trafficking happen among this group. The indicator developed by India under SDG 4 is limited to gender parity in higher education. ***Given that education is the single most important driver for achieving other targets and goals, South Asian governments should develop more gender-specific indicators on education.*** According to key facts on violence against women put out by the World Health Organisation¹¹, men who have low education levels are more likely to perpetrate violence against women. Likewise, women with low levels of education experience more intimate partner violence. ***Therefore, education indicators under SDG 4 must be localised with greater sensitivity to gender goals and targets and not just for employability.***

Entrenched parochial customs, regressive norms, harmful practices and prejudiced traditions in South Asia have placed women in an unequal position within the society, and generations of women have willingly upheld the patriarchy without question. Centuries of socio-economic and cultural constructs have been used to explain and understand the violence against women and persisting inequality between them and men. However, very little attention is paid to addressing the inequality among women perpetrated through social norms, caste structures and the urban-rural divide. The SDGs call for an end to inequality; unfortunately, the focus has remained restricted to inequality between the sexes. ***Through specific localised indicators, governments in South Asia must actively address persisting inequalities among women, in addition to inequalities between men and women, to attain true gender equality in the region.***

One of the critical challenges that all the countries face is the non-availability of gender-disaggregated data to report across the various targets. Where gender is concerned, whatever data is available, it is often underreported or unreported. As a result, countries have chosen to leave out adopting important targets. ***The South Asian governments should prioritise developing these databases and acquire gender-disaggregated data to get an accurate overview of where gaps continue to exist for gender equality and seek to address them.***

India is one of the very few countries globally that has adapted and localised the SDG framework until the grassroots level by integrating SDGs within the local Gram Panchayat Development Plans. In addition to the national indicator framework, the states have also developed their SDG vision documents, strategies, action plans and state indicator frameworks. Localisation has resulted in ownership of the Agenda 2030 at all levels of the government. The country is moving the needle from an “all of government” engagement to a “whole of society” approach. Other South Asian governments have also adopted different processes to engage stakeholders across various sectors. Going forward, ***South Asian governments must locate the SDG implementation at sub-national and local levels as much as possible to reflect local realities and make it an all of society effort.***

The Pacific Islands Forum has developed a Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development¹² and reports¹³ on its member states’ progress on achieving Agenda 2030. The African Union uses its Agenda 2063 as its vision document and has linked Agenda 2063 to the SDGs¹⁴. Closer home, the ASEAN brought out in 2020 its ASEAN SDG Baseline Report that provides the latest data on the SDG goals, targets and indicators at the regional and national levels. In South Asia, there is immense scope and opportunity for SAARC to provide thought leadership at the regional level on SDG implementation in its member states through multi-stakeholder engagement. As of 2020, they were still proposing to set up an inter-governmental process¹⁵ to “contextualise the SDGs at the regional level,” and in November 2020, Planning Ministers from South Asia¹⁶ met online to discuss achieving SDGs in South Asia. ***SAARC, through a dedicated nodal body, should actively engage with its member states on SDGs, share good practices, and forge regional partnerships in fast-tracking Agenda 2030 in the region. More particularly, its inter-governmental mechanisms on gender like the Ministerial Meetings on Women, Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children and SAARC Gender Policy Advocacy Group should take the lead in mainstreaming gender in all relevant SDGs and bring out periodic progress reports on the member states’ progress on gender targets.***

Conclusion

South Asian countries were struggling to meet their gender targets even before COVID-19. As a region, its gender gap is worst, second only to the MENA region. The region has one of the lowest female labour participation rates in the world, and an overwhelming majority of women are employed

in the informal sector. Despite relatively higher percentages of women representation in political spaces (comparable to other regions), their collective bargaining power remains low. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities between men and women, and among women. The future of 800 million women in the region is at stake if gender targets are not met. More than before, South Asian governments need to fast track the implementation of their gender targets and localise more indicators across all relevant targets. There is an urgent need to widen and deepen policy engagement on gender equality and adequately capture the pervasive inequality among women.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19#view>
- ² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/female-poverty-rate-in-south-asia-projected-to-rise-due-to-covid-19-un/article32514106.ece>
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Afghanistan

Lailuma Nasiri

Executive Summary

On 25 September 2015, world leaders from 193 nations, including Afghanistan, endorsed an aspiring agenda for global change. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), representing a fifteen-year agenda (2015-2030), was adopted to guide the international community to achieve three objectives: end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect the planet.

Afghanistan started the nationalisation process of A-SDGs (Afghan SDGs) in 2016, the completion of which lasted for two years until March 2018. In 2017, Afghanistan submitted its first Voluntary National Report (VNR) and was due to submit its second report in 2019. Afghanistan had earlier adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2004. Still, it had limited success in achieving the goals due to the economic, political and security situation prevailing in the country. Even though not successful, the MDGs efforts did create a positive outlook for the SDGs under the 2030 agenda.

According to the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) reports, the government planned to localise and align A-SDGs with the development programs by November 2018 and move to the implementation phase by January 2019. Yet, existing information indicates that implementation was hampered by lack of security across the country, inadequate technical capacity, financial constraints and absence of realistic and accurate data. A further obstacle in making progress on the A-SDG implementation plan is the prioritisation of tasks with limited resources. The Afghan government had conflicting commitments, which make SDGs less urgent than bilateral commitments with the United States, the European Union, the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. These commitments include hard benchmarks linked to specific aid release to the Afghan government, which perhaps significantly impacted progress in the SDGs implementation process.

This chapter provides the current status of the A-SDG implementation and outlines the corresponding challenges. The chapter, however, must be understood in light of the access to data imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SDGs remain a new phenomenon to many Afghans, including officials within the government; the implementation of the SDGs is not inclusive, although claimed by the government. Multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership (government, people, academia, the private sector and the civil society or NGOs) are either missing or weak. There are inadequate financial resources for implementing the SDGs, and the government is almost entirely dependent on international funding and support, which remains a key challenge. Additionally, the lack of realistic and accurate data, technical capacity and technological resources, skills, and infrastructure is likely to hamper progress at all phases of the SDGs' implementation.

The main focus of the chapter is SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and its intersection with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). A questionnaire was prepared and shared with the respondents through email for collecting data. The respondents (15, of which 5 were women) consisted of civil society members, defense lawyers, legal experts and other prominent specialists. Meanwhile, a desk review was conducted, and the documents reviewed included the reports and documents available on the MoEc, MoFA, UN and UNDP websites. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, access to sources of information such as interviews with government officials and even UNDP staff possible.

Introduction

Decades of conflict left Afghanistan's institutional systems devastated. In 2004, when the MDGs were adopted, Afghanistan was striving to function as a state. An underdeveloped country and continuing to face challenges and obstacles, the implementation of the MDGs was marked by a lack of capacity, lack of coordination and financial constraints. But still, Afghanistan achieved a modest level of success on the MDGs despite all these challenges. Afghanistan started implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016 with equal commitment to achieve and pursue Agenda 2030.

The Afghan government finalised the Afghanistan SDGs (A-SDGs) to overcome the country's socio-economic, environmental and security challenges. Further, to lead on coordination, implementation and reporting of the SDGs, the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) was assigned by the



The SDGs Institutional Arrangement

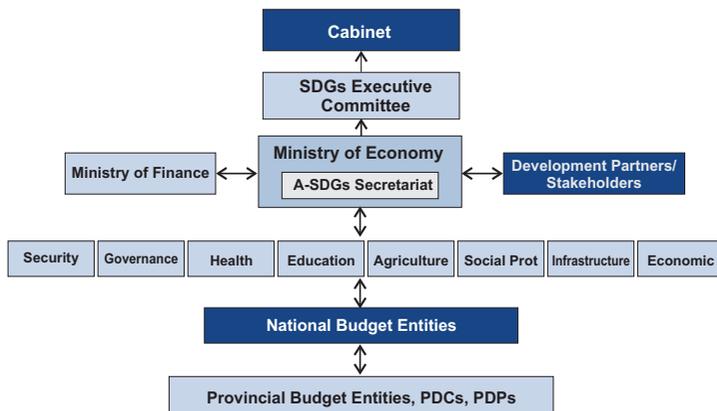


Figure 1. Source: Ministry of Economy

Ministers’ Council (Cabinet) on 7 October 2015. The MoEc, along with other initiatives, established the SDGs Secretariat under the Policy and Results-Based Monitoring Directorate of this ministry. The SDGs Secretariat prepared the first Voluntary National Report in 2017, which was presented at the 2017 UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Of the 17 SDGs, Afghanistan adopted 16 and nationalised them through 125 targets and 190 indicators. The one SDG that Afghanistan decided to opt out was Goal 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, as it does not apply to Afghanistan’s geography.

The government has aligned the A-SDGs’ targets and indicators with national policies, strategies and development plans, including the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF), a five-year strategic framework for achieving its overarching goal of self-reliance, and other national priority programs. The programs include: Private Sector Development Program, the Citizen’s Charter, Effective Governance Program, Justice Sector Reform Program; Comprehensive Agricultural Development Program; Infrastructure and Connectivity Program; Urban Development Program; Energy; National Mineral and Resources Development Program; Human Capital Development; and Women’s Economic Empowerment Program.¹ The government is also developing an integrated M&E framework and a dashboard to measure and report progress across the targets and indicators.

of A-SDGs Targets and Indicators: Sector wise

National Budgetary Sectors	Goals in Each Sector	National Targets	National Indicators
Security Sector	G3, G11, G16	5 Targets	7 Indicators
Education Sector	G4, G8, G11, G12, G16	14 Targets	41 Indicators
Health Sector	G2, G3	11 Targets	20 Indicators
Governance Sector	G16	5 Targets	6 Indicators
Infrastructure Sector	G5, G6, G7, G9, G11, G15, G17	27 Targets	30 Indicators
Social Protection Sector	G1, G4, G5, G8, G10, G11, G13, G16	22 Targets	33 Indicators
Agriculture and Rural Dev. Sector	G1, G2, G6, G9, G12, G15	12 Targets	15 Indicators
Economic Sector	G1, G8, G9, G12, G17	19 Targets	26 Indicators
8 Sectors	16 Goals	112 Targets	178 Indicators

Figure 2. Source: Ministry of Economy

Since the adoption of the SDGs, the Afghan government has shown a keenness to move forward towards sustainable development. Despite the progress, three concerns remain:² *the challenge of localising targets and indicators, the absence of a strategy for means of implementation, and a mere symbolic engagement of non-state actors.* In Afghanistan, the involvement of non-state institutions and actors, civil society, policy and research organisations, academia, and the public has so far remained symbolic. All that can be found in the media regarding SDGs is one-sided information sharing from the government. Consultative workshops and seminars with NGOs aimed at engagement within the process of nationalisation appeared more like awareness raising campaigns. Although the Afghanistan SDG report mentions engagement with non-state entities in the process, of the 19 active policy think tanks active in Kabul, none were engaged in the nationalisation phase of the Afghanistan SDGs.

SDG 5 and SDG 16

What is essential is to recognise the mutually reinforcing nature of SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. The rule of law plays a critical part in the recognition and implementation of women's rights. SDG 16 is not only important as a goal by itself; it is critically relevant to other goals as a robust legal and justice environment is both a driver and outcome of sustainable development. Affording equality to all, fair accountable institutions and frameworks, upholding justice, and protecting human rights are the basic doctrines of creating a sustainable legal environment for gender equality to flourish. In other words, robust and responsive legal frameworks

and institutions based on the rule of law are imperative in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

SDG 5, on the other hand, underlines the importance of gender equality in strengthening the rule of law. Integrating gender in laws and policies is instrumental in bringing about equitable, accountable and fair legal and justice institutions that cater to the needs of a wider population. The ideal element of any strategic formula in Afghanistan must be one that empowers women and girls, promotes the unimpeded access of their fundamental human rights, and eliminates gender-based violence (GBV), child marriage, and their systemic suppression throughout political, social, economic and all other areas of life. To achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2030 pursuant to SDG 5, the specific circumstances of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict must be addressed. SDG 5 seeks to end violence and discrimination against women and girls and also provide them with equal access to education, health care, economic opportunity, political participation and gender equivalence in all aspects of society.

Legislations such as the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (2009) and the Anti-Harassment Regulation (2016), and policies and strategies are helping establish the legal safeguards that provide for the unimpeded exercise of women's rights and their participation throughout government and society. Article three of the Education Law "emphasises on equal rights to education of Afghan citizens without any kind of discrimination." The draft Afghanistan Third National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III) for 2017 – 2021, the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, the ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the Afghan government's commitment to observing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are positive achievements despite all odds.

Key issues with relevance to implementing SDG5 and SDG16

Afghanistan is a country in sustained conflict for over four decades and faces key issues of human rights violations, civil war, deprivation of individual and group rights and many more. Afghans expected their government to investigate human rights violations to restore justice, but those expectations were not given consideration due to a variety of reasons. Instead, the focus has been on temporary and ineffective solutions which just served the personal interests of those involved.

The desk review and discussions with individuals indicate that implementation of SDGs 5 and 16 has been confronted with challenges such as the existence of societal norms and attitudes towards gender equality, low level of awareness about rights, increase in insecurity and violence, absence of or weak government control on rural areas in the country, lack of accountability and transparency within government and non-governmental organisations and the private sector, ethnicity-based favouritism, women's economic dependency, lack of strong political will and the sense of ownership, and lack of strong mechanisms for attracting financial resources.

How can links between SDG5 and SDG16 help to advance the implementation of the Agenda in general?

In the past two decades, the Afghan government and its national and international partners have invested in women's empowerment which paves the way for accomplishing SDG 5 and 16. Despite overwhelming challenges, girls have gone back to school. Thousands of women are working in government and non-government institutions holding high ranking posts such as ministers, deputy ministers, civil society activists, doctors, entrepreneurs, advocates, teachers and university lecturers. The Afghanistan Constitution clearly enshrines gender equality. The number of female students at school and universities increased significantly following the collapse of the Taliban regime. Women's presence in all spheres of life with equal opportunities helps increase the knowledge and understanding of the rights and obligations before law among the population. This could definitely have an impact on peace and access to justice. Gender equality and peace and justice are closely linked. Peace is an essential prerequisite to promote gender equality, and gender inequality undermines peace and drives conflict and violence. Still, a lot of work has to be done for improving gender equality and peaceful and just society.

The silences and shortfalls of the SDGs on the targeted population

While the SDGs and their targets' implementation in rural areas is a huge shortfall and a concern, the nationalisation process has started. Programs and activities on raising awareness of the SDGs as well as localising the targets and indicators at the provincial level are under process. Afghanistan has adopted 5 out of the 6 targets for SDG 5, and for each set of targets, it has developed 7 corresponding indicators. The target chosen are:

- *to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against women and girls in the country;*

- *elimination of all kinds of violence against women and girls in public and private places, for example, human trafficking, sexual abuse, and other kinds of inappropriate behaviours;*
- *elimination of any kind of harmful practices such as: child, forced and early marriages;*
- *recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;*
- *to assure inclusive and effective participation and also equal leadership opportunities at all levels of political, economic and public life decision making; and,*
- *enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.*

The proposed actions taken by the government include the country's constitution, elimination of violence against women law, the action plan for UN Resolution 1325, strategy for prevention of violence against women and girls, regulation on prevention of harassment against women and children, and national action plan for prevention of underage marriage.

The government, because of the lack of security and limited control in some rural areas, cannot implement the SDGs effectively and achieve the goals and targets. Additionally, delays in the finalisation of the localisation process, low rates of employment, limited access to clean water and sanitation, internal displacements due to ongoing conflict, weak coordination among stakeholders, lack or limited financial resources, need for quality education across the country, and lack of accountability in governmental institutions further impede the realisation of the SDGs. For sustainable peace and security, women must be included as equal partners in policy-making and decision-making processes in peace-making, peacebuilding, and peace-sustainment. Indeed, women's participation must occur at the most nascent stage of peace negotiations so that they can articulate their specific perspectives, needs, and demands, and to firmly establish their role in the state's future, advance its legal framework, and help shift entrenched cultural attitudes and norms, such as those promoting child marriage and relegating women to the home. Although there are developments and achievements in place as a result of the nationalisation process of the SDGs, there are bottlenecks in terms of data availability,

realistic baseline and annual milestones for the nationalised indicators. Mainstreaming the SDGs in national policies, plans, and strategies will be crucial for the success of the SDGs. Therefore, a lot of work is still needed to align A-SDGs national targets and indicators with development policies, plans and strategies. Obviously, every country has its own unique challenges while implementing the 2030 agenda. Afghanistan has its own particular challenges compounded by the continuing conflict, the current COVID-19 pandemic, and capacity and financing deficits in the public sector. Since the nationalisation process of the SDGs is being guided by high ambitions, Afghanistan has taken steps to make the global targets and indicators consistent and achievable within the national context and circumstances.

What SDGs (related to gender) should the government focus most on in the coming two decades?

Quality Education (SDG 4) is what the Afghan government needs to focus the most on in the coming two decades. Women are an integral part of the population and are contributing effectively to achieve a better, prosperous and sustainable future. Women's empowerment with quality education is an investment that will create opportunities for the meaningful presence of women at all political, economic and socio-cultural levels. Focus and interventions must be in place for women's empowerment at the sub-national and grassroots levels. Raising awareness through the media, communities, religious scholars, and other communicating tools about gender equality, peace, justice and security are required to achieve the goals and targets set for SDGs in Afghanistan.

A major issue is the lack of independent, effective and accountable institutions. Due to a variety of reasons, including ongoing conflict and weak political will, the government has not prioritised supporting the existing institutions and building new ones. Afghanistan faces a kind of neopatrimonialism where state resources are used to secure the loyalty of clients among the general population. This informal patron-client relationship is prevalent from very high up in state structures down to individuals in small villages. This does not allow an institutional perspective to state-building to take shape in Afghanistan.

While some gender-specific indicators such as access to education, work and health care are progressing, an increase in access to education, allowing for work and access to health care in urban and rural areas, require much attention. Moreover, insufficient progress on fundamental issues at the root of gender inequality, such as discrimination, unfair social norms and

attitudes, decision-making on sexual and reproductive issues and low levels of political participation, are undermining the ability to achieve SDG 5.

Without building and supporting institutions that can provide services, deliver security, safety and justice, and create an environment for economic development, gender equality may not be fully realised. The efforts to advance gender equality led by individuals are not sustainable and remains limited in scope and reach. Therefore, supporting and building effective, accountable and independent agencies is a pre-condition and part of sustainable development. Achievement of SDG 16 is therefore, a vital precondition for success in the implementation of all other goals and targets, particularly SDG 5. Achieving gender equality without promoting a just, peaceful and inclusive society is not possible, and there is significant interconnectedness between both SDGs. Institutionalised assurances of women's involvement in the peace-making and peacebuilding processes will help establish women's participation at all levels of decision-making and society, which is key to establishing enduring peace, security, stability, democracy, and gender equality.

Recommendations

National Actors, Regional Actors, CSOs and Intergovernmental Actors

The government needs to play the role of a facilitator and involve all stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, civil society organisations, policy and research institutions, academia, the media and the public, to engage in SDGs nationalisation, alignment and implementation process. Following are a set of recommendations for different actors in the process of A-SDGs implementation:

National Actors:

- Establish a national platform that integrates the contribution from all relevant stakeholders for the planning, implementation and review of SDGs.
- Commit to improving and promoting good governance, human rights and access to justice to properly implement the SDGs.
- Create new communication mechanisms to establish strong ties among different segments of society.
- Accelerate the participation of different stakeholders such as local administrations, academia, NGOs, and the private sector in the policy formulation and implementation regarding sustainable development.

This will ensure that the principles concerning inclusiveness, accountability and transparency are met.

- Improve dialogues, especially among women, children, and youth, to ensure participation at the widest level, with the ultimate purpose of achieving the SDGs.
- Additionally, the principle of “leaving no one behind” means reaching everyone for ensuring that every individual receives the full package of opportunities provided by the SDGs.
- The private sector, as the main producer of goods and services, can enhance sustainable development and bear vital importance at every level of the SDGs implementation, particularly the localisation process.

Regional Actors:

- Regional coordination, given shared challenges at the regional level is required.
- A strong partnership is required with regional and international stakeholders and research centres for knowledge and technology transfer, capacity building programs and sharing best practices among the regional countries.
- Platforms such as SAARC, which has a mandate for coordination and cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda in South Asia, can be productive to facilitate the sharing of good practices and cross-learning.

Civil Society:

- The involvement of civil society organisations and the media throughout the process of SDGs’ implementation is essential.
- Public discussion around the SDGs – in media and by CSOs – is not happening enough. Consultations involving the CSOs and media play an important role in campaigning and supporting ground-level implementation of sector-specific programs, particularly on and around SDGs 5 and 16.
- NGOs have great potential for providing their sustainable development perspective and disseminating them to all levels of society.
- Holding the government to account by demonstrating where actions are inadequate is an important role of civil society.

- Efforts should be made, however, to present a constructive picture of implementation, applauding good practice where necessary and highlighting areas where more work is needed.
- Shadow reports and shadow analysis by civil society can be a powerful platform to challenge and verify the claims in government progress reports.

Intergovernmental Actors:

- Sharing national reviews and processes of countries to help other countries to learn from their experiences. Afghanistan needs to learn more about the other countries' experiences on how they managed to integrate the SDGs into their national agendas.
- Financial and technical support from the international development partners and capacity building programs with a focus on best practices of the regional countries.

Conclusion

Adopting the SDGs when the withdrawal of the international military forces is underway, along with a decrease in development assistance, has had a great impact on the process of SDGs implementation. The security situation and challenging political situation following the 2014 elections, among other impediments have had a negative impact on results that Afghanistan should have achieved on SDGs.

Political commitment, policy integration, long-term strategic vision, policy and financing impacts, policy coordination, local and regional involvement, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, reporting and evaluation are in short supply when it comes to Afghanistan SDGs' implementation. Being a country in conflict, fighting poverty for ensuring an honourable life and equality for each and every citizen on the one hand, and having a peaceful society, ensuring the rule of law and good governance as enablers for Afghanistan's SDGs on the other, are huge challenges that Afghanistan has been dealing with.

There have been efforts by the Afghan government, international community and civil society to understand, implement, mobilise resources, monitor and report on SDGs. The fact the SDGs are placed at the Ministry of Economy, which has little leverage in the government, shows that the country is not very serious about its implementation. However, SDGs are not "mainstreamed" into Afghan public policy in terms of high-level

government decision-making, resource allocation, and evaluation of government programs. The Ministry of Finance, as the main development policy formulation agency that allocates resources, does not prioritise SDGs in its decision making.

The conflicting international commitments of the Afghan government makes SDGs less urgent. These commitments could overlap with the SDGs. However, they do not acknowledge SDGs as the overall direction. Another bottleneck in the process is the lack of a clear direction from the political leadership on which policy document is the strategic framework for the country. There are a variety of policies and strategies in the country – agency level, thematic level, and national level – as well as commitments to external agencies like the US and EU. There is a need for clarity at the highest level, which could then be translated at the levels below. In addition to weak political will and lack of mainstreaming, the lack of resources is another concern in the implementation of the SDGs.

Endnotes

- ¹ Aligning National Priority Programs (NPPs) with Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals
- ² <https://maisam-najafizada.com/2018/01/03/three-challenges-for-afghanistans-sustainable-development-goals-adoption/>

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Bangladesh

Ashish Banik

Executive Summary

Bangladesh has taken a number of measures, in terms of building legal frameworks and institutional arrangements, for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The measures include adopting the 7 Five Year Plan (FYP), mapping of the ministries with assigned tasks as regards SDG implementation, conducting analysis on data gaps, and placing a national monitoring mechanism to review the progress of SDGs. It is however undeniable that the implementation of SDGs is a long term, deep and broad process to encompass a whole community and drive it towards a sustainable path of development. In fact, SDGs are not only interdependent but also complementary to each other in terms of producing impact and outcome. This is a modest effort to review the progress on SDG 5, that targets to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girl and its intersections with SDG 16, that promotes peaceful, and inclusive society for sustainable development, provides access to justice and builds effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Bangladesh is an interesting case study of mixed progress on women's rights, participation and empowerment. The international community has also lauded the progress made on women's empowerment in Bangladesh during the last three decades, including the progress in reduction of maternal mortality, advancement in gender parity in school enrolments and participation in public life, alongside formalization of legal and policy frameworks., This progress is the outcome of policy action and civil society activism. According to UNDP's Human Development Report 2018, the country has moved three steps up in the global Human Development Index (HDI) and progress in women's health, education and participation contributed the most in making this possible. Despite such progress, Bangladesh has been experiencing a rising trend in Gender Based Violence (GBV), early and forced marriage and a sharp rise in gender inequality. In addition, discrimination against women and girls still persists in various

forms depriving them of their basic rights and opportunities. It is this context that provides a justification for undertaking a review of gender equality and women's empowerment through the promotion of inclusiveness, justice and accountability in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh, as a signatory of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has been engaged in implementing the SDGs for the last five years, playing also an active role in the global discourse on the SDGs. Bangladesh's Seventh Five-Year Plan (7FYP) (2016–2020) has made an attempt to integrate the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda which testifies to the prioritization of the SDGs by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in its policies and plans. As part of this initiative, government has been following the whole of society approach with an aim to ensuring the participation of a range of actors that include the non-government organizations (NGOs), private sector, media and CSOs and development partners in the process of designing the action plan for implementing the SDGs.¹ In order to move forward the entire process, the SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee has been constituted at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to facilitate the implementation of SDGs Action Plan whereas the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission under the Ministry of Planning is acting as the Secretariat.² As part of compliance, Bangladesh presented its Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) of the UN in 2017. Though the country, did not attend the meeting of HLPF that took place in July 2019 in New York, it has submitted the second VNR to HLPF in 2020.³ The National Action Plan for the implementation of the SDGs has been prepared by GED of Bangladesh Planning Commission. It is coordinating the Action Plans of the 43 lead Ministries/Divisions through a rigorous process of consultations, review and feedback. A Development Results Framework (DRF) has also been embedded in the Plan for monitoring the 7FYP.⁴

It is globally recognized that Bangladesh has made remarkable progress on many issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment. The World Economic Forum in its recent report, titled 'Global Gender Gap Report 2020,' reveals that Bangladesh is ranked on top in South Asia since it has performed the best on narrowing the gender gap. Bangladesh has closed 72.6% of its overall gender gap and is ranked 50th among 153 countries.⁵ This achievement and recognition is indeed a testimony to Bangladesh's success under Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This

progress, however, needs to be capitalized by further advancement under the Sustainable Development Agenda. Many experts believe that the successful implementation of SDGs, including SDG 5, would require steps towards the promotion of freedom, justice and human rights to create inclusive platforms and a conducive environment for women and girls to play a larger role. Without accountable and inclusive institutions, fundamental freedoms, access to justice for all as enshrined in Goal 16 of the SDGs, it would be difficult to achieve the targets set under SDG 5. Indeed, “these lofty aspirations concerning governance, accountability and anti-corruption, captured, are not merely standalone targets but are to be mainstreamed and embedded in each of the 17 SDGs.”⁶ The Sustainable Development Solution Network has recently published a global report on the SDGs, which provides an SDG index of 149 countries, ranking them in terms of their 2015 status on each of the goals. According to the report Bangladesh ranks last (118) among the BIMSTEC countries (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand) and second last among the SAARC countries (Afghanistan 139, Bhutan 82, India 110, Myanmar 117, Nepal 103, Pakistan 115).⁷

This report largely draws inputs from relevant literature on national and international data; surveys and research reports which dealt with various aspects of SDG implementation. Secondary information has been taken from a range of sources, such as the Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), different sectoral reports of the GoB and reports of civil society organizations (CSOs).

SDG 5 and 16 in the Context of Bangladesh

The UN Secretary-General’s 2019 Report on the SDGs recognizes that “*there is simply no way that we can achieve the 17 SDGs without achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls*”.⁸ It is also important to recognize the fact that the promotion of SDG 5 (Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women) will largely depend on the advancement of SDG 16 (Inclusive platform, Access to Justice and Freedom for All), due to the dependency and complementarity between the two, in the context of Bangladesh. The Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018 has categorically identified three challenges – eradicating violence against women, preventing child marriage, gender digital divide – responsible for slowing the progress of SDG 5 in Bangladesh.

It is widely recognized that a proactive role by women could secure and consolidate governance in the society through building social cohesion,

which has been highlighted in the National Plan of Action on Women in Peace and Security⁹ and also highlighted in the agenda for advancing a culture of peace,¹⁰ against a culture of violence. Unfortunately, women suffer from insecurity, abuse, violence and deprivation in various forms in many parts of Bangladesh. Several recent studies have eloquently borne this out. Ain o Shalish Kendro, a local rights group, evaluated the situation in these words, ‘Despite women’s advancement in education, administration, sports and economic, social and cultural spheres as well as initiatives of different GO-NGO to curb violence against women, they continue to be victims of various forms of violence including rape, sexual harassment, etc. Like in the previous years, in 2018 women were subjected to many forms of violence as well.’¹¹ The general climate of conflict and insecurity, often fed by patriarchy and prejudices, ends up in increasing violence against women at different levels.

Norms, practices and policy, play a defining role in either creating or obstructing space for women in society. *First*, the social **norms** play a very important role in determining the role of women in society. The issue of security/insecurity of women is largely analyzed within the frames of existing *social norms*. In fact, there is recognition that the circumstances leading to a conflict or violence, where women could be a victim, are essentially fed by existing gender norms. These norms are generally biased against the equal rights, roles and participation of women in Bangladesh society. Interestingly, socialization perpetuates such trends across generations. *Second*, women’s insecurity also grows from the existing social, cultural, political and economic **practices**, which are also generally loaded against the equal rights of women, regardless of spirited campaigns against them by the CSOs. Continued rise in violence against women, child marriage and trafficking of girls and women and recent trend of women involvement in extremist violence are some of the sordid manifestations of the bias against women and girls. *Third*, interestingly, **policy** could also sometimes induce insecurity for women if it is not matched by adequate, effective, just and accountable execution. This may somehow explain the paradox of existence of a large body of laws to promote the interests of women in public life and the growing trend of violence and discrimination perpetrated against women in Bangladesh. In reality, over the last three decades, particularly since the Beijing Women Conference in 1995, Bangladesh has enacted many laws and legal frameworks to ensure the participation of women in various sectors of life and uplift the position of women in society by offering various forms of incentives. Over politicization and partisan outlook, drastic fall in quality of governance,

impunity and unavailability of timely justice, along with lax or practically little implementation of the existing laws and regulations could testify to this inference. Indeed, a society, which is suffering from simmering/subaltern violence and conflicts, a nuanced and inclusive approach, would produce better and perhaps sustainable results to advance the interests of women.

Experts are of the view that the advancement of SDG 16 has become more relevant to promote the targets of SDG 5 in the context of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The situation is likely to deepen further as the possibility of continuing risk from the Covid-19 persists, thereby further exposing the un-sustainability of the current economic model and resource distribution mechanism, with particular focus on the widening economic disparity and social exclusion, which essentially run counter to the central tenet of the SDGs-leaving no one behind! In the Readymade Garment (RMG) sector of Bangladesh 65% of employees are women (around 3 million) who are among the hardest hit by COVID-19. One-quarter of garment workers have been fired because of declining global orders amid the coronavirus crisis. Along with this, 91.8% of the total employment of women is in the informal sector. All of their earnings are at stake due to the countrywide lockdown situation and sudden fall in demand.¹² In a similar fashion, Bangladesh's health system is also dominated by women, where more than 94% of nurses are female, and more than 90% of community health workers are female who are now at the risk of health hazard.¹³ The entire accountability and justice mechanism¹⁴ needs to be reactivated to protect the rights of women and girls during this crisis period.

The Research of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), an independent research organization, regarding the national prioritization and SDGs, reveals that out of the 17 SDGs – eight Goals are better integrated in the existing national prioritization processes and about 20 percent of the targets are not currently reflected in national priorities, including the targets of SDG 5.¹⁵ Despite the setup of a high level monitoring committee to constantly update the progress of various ministries and departments, the data collection to indicate progress is still not satisfactory. SDG tracker, set up by the government to gather data against indicators and targets of SDGs, has been providing data and information relating to the government's advancement towards the implementation SDGs. It is observed, that of the 13 indicators of the 9 targets under Goal 5, official government data is available only for seven indicators whereas among the 23 indicators of the 12 targets under Goal 16, official government data is available only for

eight indicators of six targets. The report could not present uniform assessment of all targets of SDG 5 and 16 because of complete lack of data, lack of up-to-date data for the relevant indicators and lack of sex desegregated data. The real picture of progress in terms of target and indicators of both the Goals according to SDG tracker is as follows:

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	Indicator : 5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	Data is not available
	Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	Indicator : 5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months, by form of violence and by age group	Target (2020): 40% ¹⁶ Updated Data is expected to be available in 2021
		Indicator : 5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner, in the last 12 months, by age group and place of occurrence	Target (2020): 3% ¹⁷ Updated Data is expected to be available in 2021
Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	Indicator : 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	Data is not available	

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
	Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	Indicators 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location	Status (2015): Female (16.1%) Male (5.4%) ¹⁸
	Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	Indicator : 5.5.1: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	Status (2018): Local govt. (25.21%) ¹⁹ Target (2020): National parliament (33%) ²⁰
	Target 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences	Indicator: 5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care decisions regarding sexual relations	Target (2020): Sexual relation (20%) contraceptive use (70%) reproductive health care (70%) ²²
		Indicators 5.6.2: Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal	Global level indicato

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
		access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education	
	Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws	Indicators 5.a.1: (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	Data is not available
		Indicators 5.a.2: Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	Data is not available
	Target 5.b: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women	Indicator : 5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex	Status (2015): 79.76% ²³
	Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels	Indicator : 5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment	Global level indicator

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Indicator : 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by age group and sex	Status (2018): 1.55 ²⁴
		Indicator : 16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause	Data is not available
		Indicator : 16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months	Target (2020): 47% ²⁵
		Indicator : 16.1.4 Proportion of people that feel safe walking alone around the area they live	Status (2018): 85.15% ²⁶
	Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children	Indicator : 16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month	Data is not available
		Indicator : 16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age group and form of exploitation	Status (2018): Overall (0.3) Female (0.33) ²⁷
		Indicator : 16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18	Target (2020): 3% ²⁸

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
	Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Indicator : 16.3.1 Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms	Target (2020): 10% ²⁹
		Indicator : 16.3.2 Unsentenced detainees as a percentage of overall prison population	Status (2018): Overall (81.3%) segregated data is available ³⁰
		Indicator : 16.3.3 Proportion of the population who have experienced a dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, by type of mechanism	
	Target 16.4: By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime	Indicator : 16.4.1 Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars)	No data available
		Indicator : 16.4.2 Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments	No data available
	Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	Indicator : 16.5.1 Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a	No data available

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
		bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments	
		Indicator : 16.5.2 Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months	No data available
	Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Indicator : 16.6.1 Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar)	No data available
		Indicator : 16.6.2 Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services	Status (2018): 39.69 ³¹
	Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Indicator : 16.7.1 Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions	No data available

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
		Indicator : 16.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group	No data available
	Target 16.8: Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance	Indicator : 16.8.1 Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organizations	Global level indicator
	Target 16.9: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration	Indicator: 16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age	Status (2019): 56.2 ³²
	Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Indicator: 16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months	No data available
		Indicator : 16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information	No data available

Goal	Target	Indicator	Progress in Bangladesh
	Target 16.a: Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	Indicator : 16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles	No data available
	Target 16.b: Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	Indicator : 16.b.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law	No data available

Recommendations

- **Leadership:** It is important to promote women's leadership, through which they could claim and ensure their effective participation in decision making process at various levels of governance from grassroots to national level on issues of human rights and justice.
- **Solution through peaceful means:** It is required to generate discussion on difficult issues, such as violence, conflict and the threat of extremist violence, build capacity and explore solutions through peaceful means and peace building exercises, among others. This is particularly relevant in the context of growing evidence that women could be better interlocutors in promoting peace in a society afflicted by multi layered and multi-dimensional violence and conflict.
- **Building Network:** It is essential to build up a network of women organizations to collectively raise their voice, from grassroots to

national level, so as to leverage them into policy process and ensure their timely and effective implementation.

- **Global demand:** It is necessary to sensitize the policy makers about the local and global demand to empower and ensure participation of women in an inclusive and substantive manner.
- **Minority and disadvantaged groups:** It is required to include women and girls from the minority and disadvantaged communities to give them a voice and create a space for their participation on issues that impact them.
- **Partnership between CSO and Government:** The CSOs, especially rights-based organizations, need to be encouraged to play a greater role including awareness building in partnership with government to promote and achieve the targets of SDG 5 and SDG 16. With the help of the CSOs, citizen's can better contribute to the development of a responsive government at all level. CSOs may take the lead to generate a plurality of voices to make the service delivery fair and transparent; generate social capital to effect the distribution of resources; and promote empowerment of citizens for meaningful and structured participation in the national and local policies relevant to the interest of the women and girls.
- **Promotion of Dialogue and advocacy:** Civil society groups should undertake open dialogue and strategic advocacy with members of local government and administration with a view to increase the participation of women and girls in policies that affect their lives. Similarly, advocacy should be undertaken with key officials at the regional level and in Dhaka for the protection of the rights and interests of vulnerable women and girls.

Conclusion

SDG 16 has been identified as a transformative goal which contains a range of cross cutting issues essential for building a **just, democratic, inclusive and sustainable society**. As SDGs provide a comprehensive blueprint to strengthen the capacity of state and social actors for sustainable growth and progress, this review has highlighted the correlation between the SDG 5 and SDG 16 to respond to structural drivers of discrimination and marginalization in order to rescue the dignity, honour and participation of the women and girls in society. While doing so, a creative and blended approach need to be explored through renewal of communication, sharing

of knowledge, building connections and using learning as evidence for forging a new partnership between the government and community stakeholders to revisit the existing model of SDG implementation process and policy approaches for building a sustainable socio, economic and political order.

Endnotes

- ¹ See, Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018, p. 33
- ² See Four Years of SDGs in Bangladesh, Non-State Actors as Delivery Partners, edited Mustafizur Rahman, Published by Citizen's Platform for SDGs in Bangladesh, p.120 <https://pea4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Revised%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Freamwork%20Full%20Book%20f.pdf>
- ³ See, Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018, P. 33
- ⁴ See Four Years of SDGs in Bangladesh, Non-State Actors as Delivery Partners, edited Mustafizur Rahman, Published by Citizen's Platform for SDGs in Bangladesh, p.120
- ⁵ View expressed in an interview with a high ranked government official at GED at Ministry of Planning Commission, 7 June 2020
- ⁶ See, Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018, P.30
- ⁷ See Global Gender Gap Report of World Economic Forum, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf
- ⁸ See Four Years of SDGs in Bangladesh, Non-State Actors as Delivery Partners, edited Mustafizur Rahman, Published by Citizen's Platform for SDGs in Bangladesh, p. 151
- ⁹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network, "SDG Index & Dashboards Report", 2017; available at: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/sdg-index-and-dashboards-report-2017/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.2030spotlight.org/en/book/1883/chapter/sdg-5-advancing-womens-rights-and-strengthening-global-governance-synergies>
- ¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, *The National Plan of Action on Women in Peace and Security, 2018*.
- ¹² Bangladesh has moved the resolution in the UNGA in 1997 on the adoption of a resolution on the Culture of Peace and since then this idea has been mainstreamed within the UN system and accepted as a norm around the world.
- ¹³ Ain O Salish Kendra, *Human Rights Situation of Bangladesh in 2018*, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ¹⁴ See UN Women Report, COVID-19 Bangladesh: The Rapid Gender Analysis, page 6
- ¹⁵ Ibid, page 6
- ¹⁶ Annual Performance Agreement (APA), Citizen Charter, National Integrity Strategy (NIS), and Grievance Redress System (GRS) under social protection programmes. These tools may ensure creation of more responsive and corruption free public institutions in the future.
- ¹⁷ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh: Key Challenges and Missing Links: Focus should be on Internal Resource Mobilization and Effective Democratic Institutions, <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/18086>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/43/3/0#1>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/44/3/0#1>
- ²⁰ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/47/3/0#1>
- ²¹ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/59/3/0#1>
- ²² <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/62/3/0#1>

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- ²³ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/62/3/0#1>
- ²⁴ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/64/3/0#1>
- ²⁵ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/91/3/0#1>
- ²⁶ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/191/3/0#1>
- ²⁷ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/195/3/0#1>
- ²⁸ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/197/3/0#1>
- ²⁹ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/201/3/0#1>
- ³⁰ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/202/3/0#1>
- ³¹ <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/203/3/0#1>
- ³² <https://www.sdg.gov.bd/page/indicator-wise/1/205/3/0#1>

India

Mallika Joseph

Executive Summary

In India, the sex ratio at birth is 898 girls per 1000 boys. One in three married women experiences spousal violence. Female labour participation rate stands at 17.5 percent and is declining. Women are confined to the informal sector, and 66 percent of their work is unpaid compared to 12 percent of men's. More women are illiterate than men. Women with equal qualification as their male colleagues, continue to draw less salary than them. Crimes against women and children, particularly girls, are on the rise, with no corresponding improvement in the criminal justice system to ensure higher conviction rates. More women go missing than men, and most women who went missing in 2018 were from the age group of 15-45 years. Representation of women has increased in politics. But they are resoundingly absent in corporate Board Rooms and higher administrative services. Current socio-economic and cultural constructs prevalent in India privilege women from one community over another. Inequality among women remains unaddressed in the SDG India Index and Indicator Framework, which needs to be addressed to achieve gender equality.

Education is the single most significant driver that determines every gender target's outcome and makes a marked improvement in women's lives and livelihoods. Additional localised gender-specific indicators are required under SDG 4 for India to address gender gaps in education between rural and urban areas, between different communities, and improve literacy rates among women.

The SDGs offer an excellent integrated framework to adopt a holistic approach in achieving gender targets. The Indian government has risen to the challenge and has developed one of the most complex, comprehensive and coherent indicator framework and monitoring system. It is a significant first step. To truly achieve gender equality and end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and actively include women in

the labour force recognising their contribution in the informal sector, unpaid work and care, India needs to localise more indicators. Additional localised indicators will push the states to perform better across all the gender-specific targets and indicators. India's performance on SDG 5+, despite critical omissions and weak localisation of targets, is the lowest across all states and union territories. Even if there is a marginal improvement in these figures by 2030, it would positively impact millions of women given India's population size and demographic profile.

Introduction

The reality of gender equality in India manifests through several paradoxical trends, as observed in the 2016 Draft National Policy for Women.

“The growing acknowledgement of gender rights and equality is juxtaposed against an increase in report of various form of violence against women such as rape, trafficking, dowry etc.; expansion of new work opportunities for women alongside continued weak bargaining power in the labour market; increasing number of educated, aspiring career women entering the workplace, where large sections of women are still in the low paid informal sector. Similarly, the feminisation of agriculture and growing number of women farmers raises the larger issue of gender entitlements to land and assets ownership.”

India ranks 112 (out of 153 countries studied) in the 2020 Global Gender Gap report of the World Economic Forum. It has slipped behind four ranks since 2018,¹ despite marginal improvement² in its attempt to close the gap which currently stands at 67 percent. Female labour force participation, at 32 percent, has been on the decline in recent years. The average wage and salaries of women are at 70 percent of their male colleagues. The number of women holding managerial positions has declined, and barriers continue to exist for women to own land, access finance and financial products.

India has one of the highest numbers of maternal and infant mortalities in the world. According to NFHS 4 (National Family Health Survey 4 undertaken in 2015-2016),³ one in three women surveyed had experienced spousal violence. Gender parity in higher education notwithstanding, literacy rates among women continue to be very poor at 65 percent compared to 82 percent among men (2011 Census). The representation of women in the national parliament has increased from 11 percent in 2014 to 14 percent in 2019. In Panchayati Raj institutions (local self-government in rural areas) women hold about 46 percent seats (2016).

The Indian government has introduced various schemes at national and state levels to improve women's socio, economic, and political conditions. For instance, under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, loan amounts are made available to women entrepreneurs. The *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* (save the girl child, educate the girl child) campaign seeks to address girls' education. The *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana* (Prime Minister's People's Wealth Scheme), aimed at financial inclusion, facilitated women, mainly from weaker sections of the community, to open bank accounts for direct debit from various government schemes. From 2005, India has adopted gender-responsive budgeting and releases the Gender Budgeting Statement. For the past fifteen years, the gender budget has been below 5 percent of the GDP.

As the second-most populous country globally, India understands that women's empowerment is fundamental to achieving several SDGs' targets. Towards this end, India has adopted many gender-specific targets across the SDGs, in addition to SDG 5 targets on gender equality.⁴ Through an elaborative consultative process, India has localised the SDG targets and aligned its various programs along with SDG targets and localised indicators. Localisation has happened at the national and individual states' levels and beyond at district levels. Thus far, a review of the SDG indices and reports brought out by the government indicates that the gender-related targets are the single most underachieved targets across the SDGs despite better performance than previous years. Given that SDG 4 on education is the fundamental driver on achieving most if not all the gender-related targets, in this paper, it is used as a cross-cutting theme to highlight the points of intersection between education and other targets.

Operationalising Agenda 2030 in India

In India, the NITI Aayog is the apex coordinating agency for all SDG-related work. It facilitated the consultation process between the government, private and civil society stakeholders in the localisation of the targets. While the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation developed the National Indicator Framework on the SDGs, the central and state governments⁵ mapped the various government schemes and programmes that matched India's targets against each SDG. The state governments have further drafted specific vision documents⁶ on SDGs, followed by strategies and action plans on operationalising their vision documents. As a result, states have adopted individual State Indicator Frameworks, and few states are developing District Indicator Frameworks.⁷ Aiming to take the SDGs framework to the absolute grassroots level, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj

is currently integrating SDGs within the local Gram Panchayat Development Plans.

In 2018, India brought out its first SDG India Index and Baseline Report,⁸ which was the first attempt at showcasing the localisation of targets and detailed monitoring of the indicators at national and local levels. The 292 pages report captured what is probably one of the most comprehensive exercises undertaken to localise SDG goals and targets in any country. It chose to contextualise and localise 13 out of 17 SDGs (leaving out goals 12, 13, 14 and 17). In 2019, it brought out its second SDG India Index and Dashboard,⁹ with updated indicators and targets. In 2018, India localised 39 targets, and in 2019, this increased to 54 targets.¹⁰ State governments have also been encouraged to adopt SDG budgeting to align existing programmes and schemes with SDG goals and identify gaps for improvement. For instance, Himachal Pradesh (one of the front running state for SDG achievement), introduced 30 new schemes in 2018-2019 to bridge gaps in target achievement. After its mapping exercise, Maharashtra approved a “Livelihood Program for Rural Women” which aims to provide financial services to about 112,900 underprivileged and debt-ridden women from 125 blocks in 23 districts to improve their financial stability.

India’s Performance in SDG 5+ Gender Targets and Indicators

Of the 37 total states and union territories monitored, the goal where the maximum number of states have performed poorly is SDG 5 on gender equality. Just three states scored more than 50 in the index score (2019). In 2018, India chose to measure progress on 4 out of 9 global targets relating to gender and developed six localised indicators for these four targets. Table 1 below provides an overview of all the gender targets India localised.

TABLE 1: India and SDG 5 Targets and Indicators

Goal	Localised Indicator
SDG 5 Gender Equality	
5.1	<p>End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls</p> <p>Sex ratio at birth (female per 1000 male). Target: 954 Current status: 896</p> <p>Female to male ratio of average wage/ salary earnings Target: 1 Current status: 0.78</p> <p>Rate of crimes against women per 100,000 female population Target: 0 Current status: 58/100,000</p>

5.2	Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres	Percentage of ever-married women aged 15-49 years who have ever experienced spousal violence Target: 0 % Current status: 33.3 % The proportion of sexual crime against girl children to the total crime against children Target: 0 % Current status: 59.97 %
5.5	Ensure women's full and effective participation and leadership at all levels of decision making	Percentage of seats won by women in state legislative assembly Target: 50 % Current status: 8.32 Female labour force participation rate (LFPR) Target: 100 % Current status: 17.5 %
5.a*	Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources	Operational land holdings-gender wise Target: 50% Current status: 13.96%

Data from 2019 SDG India Index

*In 2019, India moved the indicator under goal 5.6 on reproductive health to goal 3.7 and dropped goal 5.6. In its place, it adopted goal 5.a on equal rights to economic resources.

Significant targets that were not adopted were:

5.3: Eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage

5.4: Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work

5.b: Enhance the use of technology to promote empowerment of women

5.c: Strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality

Additionally, India has also adopted gender-specific targets and indicators in other SDGs. This integrated approach to gender, made possible due to the SDGs' interconnected nature, will go a long way in improving women's lives and livelihoods and through their empowerment contribute to India's overall development. Table 2 provides an overview of the gender-specific indicators India developed for other selected goals.

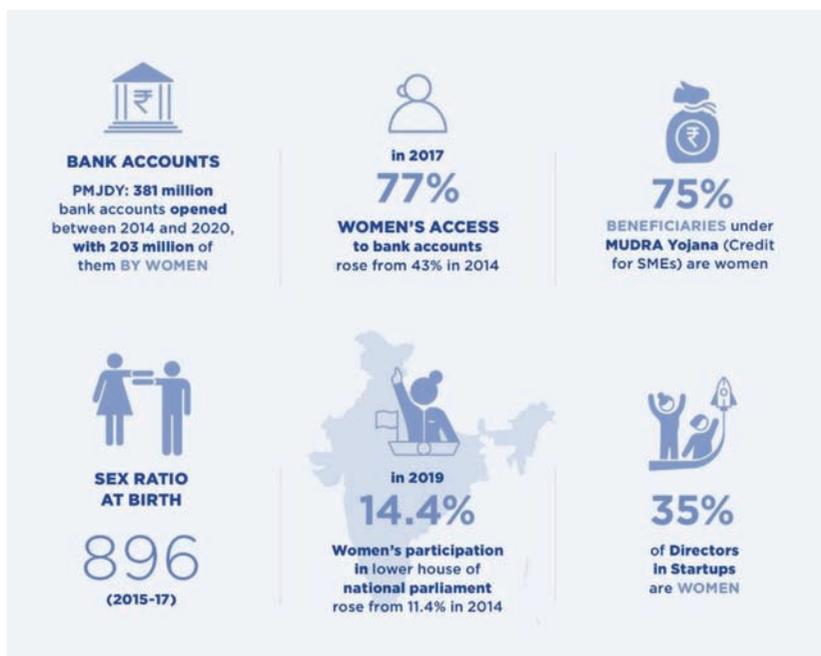
TABLE 2: India and SDG 5+ Gender-Specific Indicators

Goal		Localised Indicator
SDG 5+ Other SDGs with gender-specific indicator developed by India		
1.3	Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems	One of the three localised indicators is: The proportion of the eligible population receiving social protection benefit under the Maternity Benefit Target: 100 Current status: 36.40
2.2	End all forms of malnutrition	One of the four localised indicators is:Percentage of pregnant women 15-49 years who are anaemic Target: 25.15% Current status: 50.3%
3.1	Reduce maternal mortality rate	Total of two localised indicators:(a) Maternal Mortality Ratio Target: 70/ 100,000 Current status: 122/ 100,000 (b) proportion of institutional deliveries Target: 100 Current status: 94.3
3.7	Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care	Total of one localised indicator: Percentage of currently married women aged 15-49 years who use any modern method of family planning Target: 100% Current status: 47.8%
4.5	Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education	One of two localised indicators: Gender Parity Index for higher education (18-23 years) Target: 1 Current status: 1
6.2	Sanitation and hygiene for all	One of four localised indicators:The proportion of schools with separate toilet for girls Target: 100 Current status: 97.43
8.10	Expand access to banking and financial services	One of three localised indicators:The proportion of women account holders under the Prime Minister's People's Wealth Scheme Target: 0.5 Current status: 0.53
10.2	Empower and promote social, economic and political inclusion of all	One of three localised indicators:The proportion of seats held by women in Panchayati Raj institutions Target: 50% Current status: 44.4%

Data from 2019 SDG India Index

Health: SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 3.1, 3.7, and 6.2

India has the second-highest numbers of maternal mortalities in the world. While the maternal mortality rate (MMR) stands at 122/ 100,000, in terms of numbers, it is about 45,000 maternal deaths (2015) each year.¹¹ Major complications that account for nearly two-thirds of all maternal deaths¹² are severe bleeding after childbirth, infections after childbirth and high blood pressure during pregnancy. Because a majority of these deaths are avoidable if pregnant women had timely medical care, support and access to institutional delivery, India’s indicators for reaching the target of under 70 MMR¹³ are (a) monitoring of MMR (b) increasing proportion of women accessing maternal benefit (c) increasing institutional deliveries. According to SDG India Index 2019, just about 54.7 percent of deliveries happened in a health institution.¹⁴ And almost half of the pregnant women in the age band of 15-49 are anaemic.



2019 SDG India Index

Unfortunately, just 36 percent of women from poor socio-economic conditions were aware of and availed maternity benefits.¹⁵ Rupees 2500 crores was received by the Ministry of Women and Child Development for the *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* (PMKVY), for which just

about half of targeted beneficiaries (about 62.8 lakh pregnant women from a total of 123 lakh pregnant women in 2018-19) were registered under the scheme. Analysts, however, disagree on the actual percentage of beneficiaries who received support under the scheme. For instance, the total number of births in 2017 was 270.5 lakhs, of which the births covered under the scheme was just 23 percent, and mothers who received the cash benefit under the scheme was only 14 percent.¹⁶ Therefore, India must increase the budgetary allocations to reduce MMR and ensure the assistance reaches all beneficiaries.

Economic Participation: SDGs 4.5, 5.1, 5.5, 5.a and 8.10

According to the 2020 Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum, of the 153 countries studied, India is the only country where its economic gender gap is larger than its political gender gap. Women's economic participation is one of the lowest. Ranked at 145 in the sub-index relating to the economic gender gap, just about a quarter of women (compared to over 80 percent of men) are actively engaged in the labour market. Women labour force participation rate (LFPR) at 23.7 percent¹⁷ has decreased despite increasing education levels. The declining trend is particularly steep in rural areas, where in the last decade it has dropped from 49.7 percent to 26.7 percent. A majority of women are confined to the informal sector, and 66 percent of their work is unpaid compared to 12 percent of men's work. And where working alongside men, there is a significant gap in wages and income between the two sexes. Among the regular wage and salaried employees, the difference in wages was 78 percent in 2019.

Between 2015-2016 and 2017-2018, the number of women engaged in managerial positions declined from 173 to 167 per 1000 persons.¹⁸ Women judges in the Supreme Court and High Court account for only 4 percent and 10 percent of all judges, with 9 High Courts not having any female judge.¹⁹ In the government's administrative services, women account for 17 percent in the Group A Services; the foreign service, 8 percent and the police, 9 percent. And the percentage of women present in the Board of Directors of listed companies is just about 17.5 percent. Lack of adequate women in leadership positions in the administrative and private sectors should be addressed to close the gender gap across all sectors.

Women's access to economic resources and financial assets remains particularly low. Operational landholding increased marginally from 12.79 percent (2011) to 13.96 percent (2016) but still low. According to the 2017 Wada Na Todo Abhiyan report²⁰ on SDGs, unequal access to economic

and financial assets lowers women's bargaining strength, leading to poor decision-making capacity in their home and work environment.

The Indian government has introduced various schemes to improve employability and access to employment among disadvantaged communities. In 2018-2019, under the *Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana*, 62 percent of loans sanctioned were for women. According to the *Wada Na Todo* report, most of these loans were provided through micro-finance institutions known to place an additional burden of over-indebtedness further leading to poverty. With the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship reducing its allocation for women-specific schemes by 107 crores in its 2020-2021 budget compared to its estimates the previous year, women's access to capital has shrunk further.²¹

TABLE 3: Gender Gap in India

	India (rank out of 153)	South Asia Average	Global Average
Global Gender Gap	67% Rank 112	66%	69%
<i>Sub-Indices</i>			
Political Empowerment	41% Rank 18	39%	25%
Economic Participation and Opportunity	35% Rank 149	37%	58%
Educational Attainment	96% Rank 112	94%	96%
Health and Survival	94% Rank 150	95%	97%

2020 Global Gender Gap Report, World Economic Forum

Political Participation and Representation: SDGs 5.5 and 10.2

The representation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions stands at 44.4 percent, according to India's SDG Voluntary National Report 2020.²² Article 243 D of the Indian Constitution reserves one-third seats at the Panchayati Raj institutions for women, and the government has already approved a proposal to increase it to 50 percent. Most states have performed relatively well on this indicator, with states like Jharkhand having 59.18 percent women as representatives in its Panchayati Raj institutions. Of the 3 million elected representatives to these bodies, 1.3 million were women in 2019.

Studies undertaken even until a decade ago have been critical on the real impact of affirmative action in local governance. Women representatives hardly took decisions independent of male members of their family,

Panchayat or political party. Regardless, the same studies underscore the importance of these women representatives' education and getting their girls educated, despite a large percentage among themselves not completing school. The real impact was in "economic self-reliance."²³ The situation has changed over the years, as more women, better educated than before, are actively engaged in the local bodies. In an interview with UN Women, the Secretary for Panchayati Raj Ministry shared:²⁴ "Ms Arati Devi, a former investment officer with a leading bank in India, left her job to become one of the country's youngest sarpanch leaders in her village in the Ganjam district of Odisha. She started a massive literacy campaign for women that helped achieve nearly 100 percent literacy in her village." This illustration supports the findings of a study in 2020 on *Women's political representation and educational attainments: A district-level analysis in India*²⁵ which concluded that women pay more attention to education than men, particularly girls' education.²⁶

At the state level, in 2019, state assemblies have about 8.32 percentage of women representatives,²⁷ way below the localised indicator of 50 percent. At the national level, in 2019, there was 14.4 percent of women representatives in the national parliament (lower house), a slight increase from 11.4 percent in 2014. Meanwhile, women voter turnout was on the rise with 68 percent in 2019 from 65.5 percent in 2014 and 55.82 percent in 2009.²⁸

Safety and Security: SDGs 5.1 and 5.2

Over 400,000 cases of crime against women were reported in 2019, an increase of 7.3 percent²⁹ from the previous year, according to the National Crime Records Bureau report 2019.³⁰ About one-third of the crimes reported were related to cruelty by husband or his relatives. A little over 20 percent were "assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty," and about 17 percent were kidnapping and abduction of women. While in 2018, there were 58.8 crimes per 100,000 population; in 2019, the crime rate increased to 62.4 per 100,000 people. Among states, Uttar Pradesh (followed by Rajasthan and Assam) had the highest number of crimes committed against women at 59,853 contributing to 14.7 percent of crimes against women in India. Among Union Territories, Delhi recorded the highest number of cases at 13,395. Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Puducherry recorded the lowest numbers of crime, well below 200. Analysed as the rate of crimes against women per 100,000, Assam was the highest at 177.8 percent, followed by Delhi at 144 percent, Rajasthan at 110 percent, and Haryana at 108 percent.

Overall, the conviction rate for crimes against women is 22.2 percent with highest 63.2 percent for murder with rape/gang rape, and lowest 7.7 for kidnapping for ransom, followed by cybercrimes with a conviction rate of 10.8 percent. Puducherry had the highest conviction rate of 100 percent, followed by Mizoram with 88.3 percent. The lowest was in Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, and Lakshadweep with zero convictions, followed by Jammu and Kashmir with 3.4 percent conviction.

Crime against women	
Total	405861
Dowry Deaths	7162
Acid Attack	156
Cruelty by husband and his relatives	126575
Rape	32360 (4977 girls below 18)
<i>Crime in India 2019, National Crime Record Bureau</i>	

Rape constitutes about 8 percent of crimes committed against women. In actual numbers, 32,260 women were raped, of which 4977 were girls below 18 years. That's about 88 rapes each day, with 3.6 rapes happening every hour. These are the reported cases, and the actual number of incidents would be much higher.

According to NFHS 4 (2015-2016), one in three married women between the ages of 15-49 has experienced spousal violence. One-fourth of those who have experienced spousal violence have sustained physical injury, including eye injuries, sprains, dislocations, broken bones, broken teeth or burns. Spousal violence is more prevalent in rural India than in urban areas. According to the survey, sexual violence decreased sharply with schooling. And it increased manifold with the number of living children. For instance, spousal violence was 24 percent among women with no children, and 43 percent among women with five or more children. India's localised indicator for SDG 3.7 on reproductive health access is the percentage of women aged 15-49 years who use any modern family planning method, which currently is just 47.8 percent. It remains to be seen if improvements in the country's performance in SDG 4 on education, and SDG 3.7 would reduce spousal violence.

Similar to the increase in the incidences of crime against women, crimes against children have been on the rise each year. It rose from 129,032 in 2017 to 141,764 in 2018 to 148,185 in 2019. In a population of 100,000,

thirty-three children are victims of crime. The figure is the highest in Delhi with 139 children per 100,000 population. One in two crimes against children is a sexual offence against a girl child. In 2019, of the 46,682 cases that were registered, 26,229 were rapes. That's three children raped every hour. Almost the same rate of women raped every hour.

Crime against women	
Total	148185
Sexual offences (only girl child) *	46,682 <i>Rape – 26229</i> <i>Sexual assault – 16420</i> <i>Sexual Harassment – 1961</i>
Kidnapping and abduction of children	71,264
<i>Crime in India 2019, National Crime Record Bureau </i> * registered under POCSO	

For SDG 5.2 on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, and 5.1 on ending discrimination against women and girl child, India's indicators are on (a) volume of spousal violence, (b) rate of crime against women per 100,000, and (c) proportion of sexual crime against girl child against total crime figures against children. Given the magnitude and severity of crimes against women, and data availability across a wide range of factors, India should increase the number of indicators it developed to monitor crime against women and girls. However, even within the indicators developed, the statistics on violence borne by women and girls is unacceptably high.

Localising Targets: Significance of Missing Indicators

Though India developed 17 localised gender-specific indicators for monitoring gender-related and gender-neutral targets, it missed out on a few important indicators. For instance, SDG 5.2 seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. For this target, the only indicator localised by India is spousal violence. Even for this indicator, within the socio-cultural context of Indian women bound in steep traditions and customs, the actual number of women who would be forthcoming about spousal violence is likely to be extremely low.

Additionally, by restricting the focus only to spousal violence, the indicator does not reflect other forms of violence experienced by women, details of

which are already published annually in the *Crime in India* report. It also does not consider violence faced by unmarried women, and violence outside marriage and intimate partner. For instance, in 2019, of the total crimes against women, there were 32,360 cases of rapes, 4038 attempts to rape, 68,976 cases of abduction and 89,292 molestations – all of which fall outside “spousal violence.” To address this lacuna, India needs to localise additional targets on crimes against women to reduce all crimes against women and girls.

Another significant omission is an indicator on the trafficking of women and children. India is a source, a destination and transit point for trafficking women and children. A bulk of trafficking happens between and within states. According to a 2018 report on India by the Global Fund for Children,³¹ the number of trafficked children could be millions. A majority of those trafficked end up in forced labour and debt bondage in brick kilns, rice mills, agriculture, textile weaving units and embroidery factories, and the remaining are trafficked for sexual exploitation. They are from poor educational backgrounds; the National Commission for Human Rights (NHRC) reported that 71 percent of trafficked persons were illiterate. Just half of those who go missing every day are ever found. “Many are sold off by their parents for sex work or forced labour or are simply abducted by human traffickers.”³² In 2018, a total of 380,526 persons went missing, 73,138 of them, children. About 65 percent of the total missing persons were women, of which close to 90 percent (220,996) were from the age group of 15-46 years. Currently, statistics on trafficking does not include missing persons, which creates a significant challenge in arriving at an accurate understanding of the magnitude of the issue. Regardless, to reduce trafficking and missing children, India must localise two complementing indicators on trafficking and missing women and girls.

Post COVID-19, worrying reports have emerged on surge in child trafficking as well as missing children. In a span of just 11 days during the lockdown due to COVID-19, the government helpline registered 92,000 child abuse cases³³ in the family and the communities. The situation was considered severe enough that the NHRC and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights put out advisories to combat trafficking during COVID-19.³⁴

But the most important and significant reality missing in the localisation of targets is the socio-cultural factors perpetrated through the caste system that impact women acutely and create inequality among them. Dalit women lack access to financial assets and regular employment and rely mainly on

wage labour creating inequality in access among women. Just about 38 percent of Dalit women are self-employed against 62 percent of upper-caste women. The percentage of Dalit women working as agricultural wage labour is three times as much as upper-caste women.³⁵ Furthermore, compared to other caste women, Dalit women have fewer opportunities to work as cooks or waiters and end up working in polluting occupations such as scavenging. Unemployment is higher among Dalit women in comparison, and where employed, they receive wages less than women from other communities. They have low literacy levels and higher school dropout rates. A higher number of child marriage happens among SC and ST girls, compared to other communities. A 2010 National Commission for Women study in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh revealed more honour killing cases due to inter-caste marriages.³⁶ While addressing gender equality, it is vital to focus equally on inequalities among women in India.

Choosing Targets: Significance of Excluded Targets

Significant among the four SDG 5 targets that India did not choose were:

5.3: Eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage

There is a significant decrease in the rate of child marriages in India over the years. Yet, according to the 2018 report on India Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy³⁷ brought out by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, child marriage continues to be prevalent. In the age group of 15-19-year olds, it is almost 12 percent³⁸ (down from 16 percent a decade ago). India ranks sixth among the top ten countries with the highest prevalence of child marriages.³⁹ And twice the number of child marriages are happening in rural areas compared to urban ones. Overall, education and wealth have a direct impact on child marriages. For instance, the study reported that completion of secondary education significantly delayed the age of marriage among children; the percentage was as low as 2.4 percent among girls who had completed secondary education, compared to 30.8 percent of girl who had no education.



India Child Marriage and Pregnancy, 2018

Similarly, girls from low-income family backgrounds were three times more likely to be married than girls from wealthier backgrounds. In Bihar, girls from 78.9 percent of child marriages were from the bottom wealth tercile households. In Jharkhand, the figure stood at 69 percent, and Assam 66.8 percent.

In India, more than 50 percent⁴⁰ of child marriages end up in teenage pregnancies.⁴¹ An estimated 11 percent⁴² of the world's teenage pregnancies happen in India, most of whom are anaemic. Just as with child marriages, teenage pregnancies are inversely proportional to education and household wealth. A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) based on NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 reveals that stunting and under-weight were 11 percent more prevalent⁴³ in babies born to teenage mothers. Neonatal and perinatal mortality is far higher among adolescent mothers. The overall impact of child marriage and the risks of teenage pregnancies to the girl child and the socio-cultural, economic costs to the country are way too high to ignore. India needs to review adopting this target and other gender targets to provide a holistic monitoring and upliftment of all women and girls.

5.4: Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work

Another equally important gender target that India missed is recognising the value of unpaid care and domestic work. According to a 2018 report⁴⁴ by the International Labour Organisation, men in Asia and the Pacific perform the lowest amount of unpaid care work globally with 28 minutes in Pakistan and 31 minutes in India. In contrast, Indian women spend 297 minutes a day doing domestic work. Just about a quarter of men are engaged in unpaid work, compared to four-fifths of women.⁴⁵ If women were to be in formal work as much as men, the Indian GDP would increase by 1.4 percent. A primary reason for the very low female labour participation rate, which increases the financial disparities between men and women, is the disproportionate household care and responsibilities that women carry, making them unavailable for formal paid labour. India's gender gap is the highest in economic participation. Women earn just one-fifth of male income and account for only 14 percent of leadership roles, and 30 percent in professional and technical sectors.

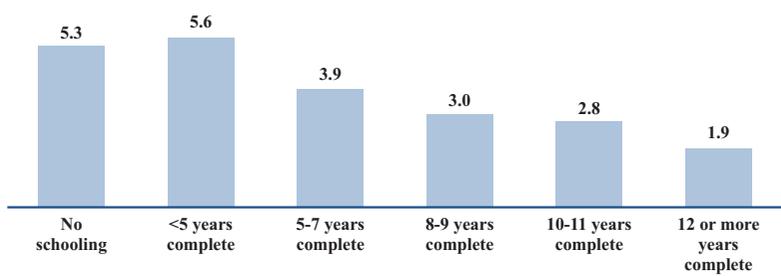
SDG 5.4 was specifically introduced to nudge states to acknowledge and value unpaid care and domestic work done by women. Though it is a global issue, it becomes crucial in contexts like India where accessible, affordable and quality care options are not provided by the state, private, or non-

profit sectors. In her Budget Speech 2020-2021, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman appreciated women's contribution within the "caring society" pillar. By confining their economic contribution to just the caring pillar, the government has missed out charting pathways for their development and enhancing their labour participation in the formal sector. To bring about real gender equality, and significantly bring parity in economic terms, India must include unpaid care and domestic target within its basket of gender targets and indicators.

SDG 4: Education – the cross-cutting SDG

Education is the single most significant factor that determines the outcome of every gender target. Yet, India's only gender-related localised indicator is the Gender Parity Index for higher education (18-23 years), where it has already reached the parity of 1. Gross enrolment rate (GER) across all levels has increased, particularly at the elementary level with 96.9 percent. However, GER in secondary education (76 percent), senior secondary (52 percent) and higher education (24.3 percent) remain low. Furthermore, 610,000 children are still out of school (2014-2015 figures).⁴⁶ While dropout figures at the elementary level have decreased, dropouts at the secondary school level have increased from 14.5 percent to 17.8 percent. Completing secondary schooling is particularly important in all gender targets relating to women's health and crimes against them.

Percentage of ever-pregnant women age 15-49 who have experienced physical violence during any pregnancy

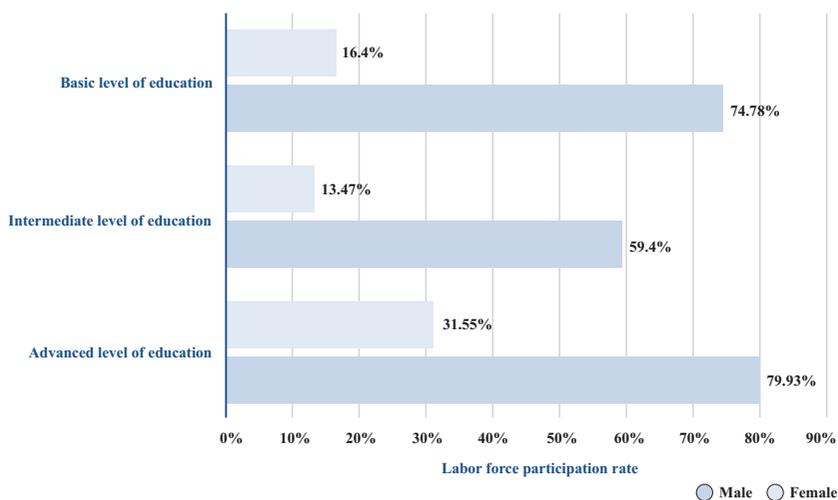


National Family Health Survey 4

Given that female labour participation is significantly less, and declining, it would be essential to seek parity in employability based on education level. There is a lower enrolment of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), including engineering and technology; Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), it is just 18 percent. In 620 Institutes

and Universities including IITs, National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), only 20 percent women are on the scientific and administrative staff. Women constitute just 27.8 percent of Post-Doctoral Fellows and 33.5 percent PhD scholars.⁴⁷

Though India has achieved gender parity in education, significant gaps exist in literacy levels between men and women. Just 59.3 percent of women are literate against 78.8 percent of literate men.⁴⁸ Three out of four trafficked persons are illiterate. States like Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam, which have high levels of illiteracy among women, have a correspondingly high incidence of crime against women and children. Prevalence of child marriages and teenage pregnancies are higher in these states. Overall, gaps in literacy are also highest between rural and urban areas. A similar pattern of higher numbers of child marriage and teenage pregnancies is prevalent in rural areas than in urban centres. Female labour force participation rate



also reveals a gap between rural and urban, and women in rural areas spend more time than their urban counterparts in unpaid activities.⁴⁹

Therefore, education is the fundamental driver that can change the outcomes across all the SDGs and make a marked improvement in the lives and livelihoods of women. Unfortunately, despite the Kothari Commission's recommendation to raise government spending on education to 6 percent of GNP as early as 1966 and the New Education Policy endorsing the recommendation, education expenditure remains below 3 percent of the GDP.

The Indian government has launched various schemes to improve the education, health, political participation and financial independence and access for women. *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* underlines the importance of educating the girl child to save the girl child. For India to achieve its gender targets, it is vital to introduce additional localised gender-specific indicators under SDG 4 on education on addressing the gender gaps in education between rural areas and urban centres, between different communities, and particularly female literacy.

Recommendations

South Asia is home to 860 million women, three-fourths of whom live in India. Among the eight regions monitored by the World Economic Forum, South Asia's gender gap at 66 percent is the second largest in the world. Despite making maximum progress the previous decades, it would still take 71 years to close the gender gap.⁵⁰ Currently, the SDGs framework is the only driver that can accelerate closing the gap earlier than 70 years, even if not by 2030.

India has already adopted SDGs as the development framework and successfully localised the targets. It has gone a step further in taking the SDGs to the state, district and Gram Panchayat level to contextualise the indicators and encourage SDG budgeting. To that extent, India is way ahead of many countries in operationalising Agenda 2030. However, given the vast gender gap in all sectors and poor performance across all gender targets, the following recommendations are being made to improve India's attempts to achieve gender equality.

➔ Expand Gender-Specific Targets and Indicators

India should widen its gender goals by adopting more SDG targets and deepen them by increasing more localised indicators. A preliminary review shows the following very crucial targets and indicators are missing. Therefore, *new gender-specific SDG indicators are required for*

- acknowledging and reducing inequality among women perpetuated through caste system, structural barriers and socio-economic, cultural exclusions
- disaggregated monitoring of all forms of crime against women and girls, beyond just occurrences per 100,000
- addressing and reducing violence against women beyond just spousal violence

- monitoring trafficking of children, particularly the girl child
- monitoring missing persons, particularly women in the age group 15-45
- improving conviction rates in all cases relating to crimes against women and girl child
- addressing and reducing child marriages
- addressing and reducing teenage pregnancies
- acknowledging unpaid work and care and seek to reduce the gender gap in this segment
- addressing gender gaps in education between rural and urban areas, between communities
- monitoring and reducing school dropouts among girls at secondary and senior secondary levels
- improving female literacy
- monitoring underspend in gender allocations and budgets across all gender-related schemes and programmes

➤ **Develop Vision Document, Strategies and Action Plan for Gender Targets**

Given that all the states' performance is poor in SDG5 and other gender-related targets, it would be useful to develop a vision and strategy for India to achieve the gender goals in consultation with various stakeholders. It would be essential to place such an initiative within a particular ministry or department to better coordinate and align all targets and indicators relating to SDG 5 plus.

➤ **Refer to and create synergies with other global indices**

India should consider adapting data and analysis from other global indices and include that in target setting and indicators. For instance, in the Global Gender Gap 2020 report, India is in the bottom five when it comes to subindices on health and survival and economic participation and opportunity. One of the indicators India could include in its SDG index is to get a better ranking in these globally recognised indices and improve India's performance in these indices. Especially gender indices.

Likewise, global indices should also incorporate and reference the SDG framework into their research outputs. For instance, it would be helpful if

the World Economic Forum, in its report on the gender gap, had mapped or explored the impact of SDG implementation on the gender gap.

➤ **Establish multi-stakeholder platforms for monitoring and implementation**

The government already undertook comprehensive consultation among different stakeholder in the process of localising its targets. It needs to continue this collaboration and institutionalise some of them into multi-stakeholder partnership platforms, particularly on gender targets, which can help the country achieve its gender goals and address the problem of underspend in gender-specific schemes.

➤ **Study the impact of COVID-19 on SDG targets, specifically women and children**

During COVID-19, there was a massive spike in the number of reported cases of violence against children. Likewise, many reports established an increase in domestic violence against women. There is a need to study and understand the impact COVID-19 has had on the realisation of all SDGs, specifically on gender goals relating to labour force participation, women's access to financial assets, and crime against women and children, trafficking of women and children and missing persons. It is essential to understand the inequalities that COVID-19 has accentuated and adopt measures to address it. Likewise, the pandemic's impact and the lockdown on education as a whole needs further study and appropriate policy intervention. In a year when schooling went online, the inequalities it created and strengthened due to access to technology needs attention.

India is already moving from a “whole of government” process to “whole of society” approach. The vision documents from the states and their strategies and action plans make constant reference to “leave no one behind.” The consultative process on the localisation of targets has worked towards co-ownership of the SDG framework at all government administration levels. To ensure that no one gets left behind by 2030, more aggressive strategies are required for a pan India upliftment of all vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Conclusion

In India, the sex ratio at birth is 898 girls per 1000 boys. One in three married women experiences spousal violence. Female labour participation rate stands at 17.5 percent and declining. Women are confined to the informal sector, and 66 percent of their work is unpaid compared to 12

percent of men's. More women are illiterate than men. Women with equal qualification as their male colleagues, continue to draw a lesser salary than them. Crimes against women and children, particularly girls, continues to increase, with no corresponding improvement in the criminal justice system to ensure higher conviction rates. More women go missing than men, and most women who went missing in 2018 were from the age group of 15-45. Representation of women has increased in politics. But they are resoundingly absent in Board Rooms and higher administrative services.

To provide equal opportunities to women and secure their safety and dignity, the government has various legislation. Some of them are Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Mindful of the importance of empowering women and addressing the overwhelming inequality, the central and states governments have launched various programmes and schemes. The *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* campaign aims to empower the girl child through education and ensure they are born, nurtured and educated without discrimination. The *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)* targets safeguarding women's health by offering free and subsidised gas cylinders, replacing coal and firewood in the kitchen. The *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana* and the *Janani Suraksha Yojana* focus on the girl child's well-being and prosperity and that of the mother. The *MUDRA* initiative offers financial assistance to women entrepreneurs, and the One-Stop Crisis Centre aims to ensure women's safety and integrity.

However, large gaps exist between schemes on paper and implementation on the ground. In 2018-2019, the share of the gender budget as a percentage of the total budgetary expenditure was 4.98 percent and had remained below five percent in most years. In terms of GDP, they shrink to less than one percent. And even here, there are huge gaps between allocation and actual spending. For instance, 89 percent of the *Nirbhaya* Fund meant for women's safety and allocated to the police, remain unutilised.⁵¹ The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment had an underspend of Rs 93 crore allocated for girls' hostels from Scheduled Caste households (the socially marginalized under the caste system). Likewise, the Ministry for Women and Child Development (MWCD) had an underspend of Rs 120 crore (out of Rs 165 crore) allocated for working women's hostels. The MWCD also had an underspend of Rs 150 crore in the scheme for adolescent girls, and

a further Rs 100 crore in *Mahila Shakti Kendra*, Rs 70 crore in One-Stop Crisis Centres. The total unspent balances in MWCD alone are 667 crores.⁵²

The SDGs offer an excellent integrated framework to adopt a holistic approach in achieving gender targets. One of its greatest strengths is the opportunity to develop country and context-specific localised indicators. The Indian government has risen to the challenge and has developed one of the most complex, comprehensive and coherent indicator framework and monitoring system. It is a significant first step. To truly achieve gender equality and end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, actively include women in the labour force, and recognise their contribution in the informal sector, unpaid work and care, India needs to localise more indicators. Inclusion of additional targets will push the states to perform better across all the gender-specific targets and indicators. India's performance in SDG 5+, despite critical omissions and weak localisation of targets, is the lowest across all states. Even if there is a marginal improvement in these figures by 2030, it would have positively impacted millions of women given India's population size and demographic profile.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-where-does-india-stand-in-the-global-gender-gap-index/article30494545.ece>
- ² <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1602397>
- ³ <http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-4Reports/India.pdf>
- ⁴ India has adopted 12 targets (4 from SDG 5 and 7 from other SDGs) and developed 17 localised indicators to monitor and report on progress relating to gender targets.
- ⁵ The phrase “state governments” has been used to include all federal units, including the governments of Union Territories.
- ⁶ According to India government’s 2019 report on “Localising SDGs – Early Lessons from India,” 23 states had already prepared their vision documents.
- ⁷ According to India’s Voluntary National Report (VNR) 2020, about 60 percent of states have developed their State Indicator Framework, and 30 percent of states have further developed their District Indicator Framework.
- ⁸ http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDX_Index_India_21.12.2018.pdf
- ⁹ https://niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/SDG-India-Index-2.0_27-Dec.zip
- ¹⁰ There are 17 SDGs with 169 targets, of which India has adopted and localized 54 targets.
- ¹¹ <https://ourworldindata.org/maternal-mortality#maternal-deaths-by-country>
- ¹² <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/maternal-health>
- ¹³ In 2019, only three states in India had a MMR below 70 – Kerala 42, Maharashtra 55, and Tamil Nadu 63. MMR was the highest in Assam at 229 followed by Uttar Pradesh at 216. Source SDG India Index 2019.
- ¹⁴ This number rose to 94.3 in India’s SDG Voluntary National Report 2020
- ¹⁵ In Odisha, 72.6 percent of eligible beneficiaries avail of their maternity benefits
- ¹⁶ https://www.ihdindia.org/Working_Ppapers/2020/IHD-CGSWP1-2020.pdf
- ¹⁷ Nagaland and Mizoram have the highest female labour force participation rate at 76 and 73 percent.
- ¹⁸ India’s SDG Voluntary National Report 2020
- ¹⁹ 2017 Wada Na Todo Abhiyan report on SDGs
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Nepal

Surabhi Singh

Executive Summary

With the goal to accelerate development progress, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are designed to bring the world to several life-changing ‘zeros’, including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.¹ The nature of the SDGs are such that each goal is interconnected with another and the achievement of one goal has a synergetic effect on the rest. Thus, this paper aims to review the status of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) achievement and its interrelationship with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and highlight the cross-sectionality of these goals. This paper also discusses why proposed solutions to integrated issues relating to gender equality and justice should come up with matching solutions in terms of fiscal, social, managerial and institutional capacities.

Nepal has shown a strong commitment towards achieving the SDGs and presented its Voluntary National Review in July 2020. Before this, Nepal has presented in 2015, 2017 demonstrating its deliberate efforts to the achievement of its SDG targets and its accountability to the international community. As the country is going through the process of implementing a new federal structure of governance, this is a great time to integrate SDGs into its development agenda in all sectors although the government acknowledges that these are long-term aspirations that may be challenging to achieve on the planned timeline of the SDG deadline. In this light, the paper highlights some of the challenges faced in achieving the SDG 5 and makes recommendations on how those challenges can be addressed.

Introduction

In the simplest sense, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be taken as a people-centered development agenda that prioritizes a right-based approach to human rights, equity and inclusiveness, and sustainability

in actions. The SDGs are an extension of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the advantage of having many lessons learned from the shortcomings of the MDGs and strives to maintain the momentum created by its predecessor through continuity in development efforts, a transformative shift from previous approaches to development through reconfigured goals, and a strong emphasis on the balance of social, economic and environmental sustainability. Moreover, recognizing the impact of economic growth in the environment, the SDGs are also an urgent call to shift the world onto a more sustainable path (UNDP).

Although the SDGs are global agendas, each country is urged to devise national targets and strategies to achieve these goals, with careful consideration of their national circumstances. To this end, Nepal has integrated the SDG goals in its 14th periodic plan, and has embarked on a journey to not only achieve the goals but to also become a vibrant middle income country by 2030. The periodic plan aims to address various development lacunae and constitute five major sectors in which consolidated efforts will be carried out. These five pillars when fleshed out, correspond to the various goals set out in the SDGs. The 5 major sectors are:

- (i) Infrastructure (Goals 6, 7, 9 and 11),
- (ii) Social (Goals 3 and 4),
- (iii) Economic (Goals 1, 2, 8, 9, 10 and 12),
- (iv) Governance (Goals 16 and 17) and
- (v) Cross-cutting (Goals 5, 13, and 15)

Moreover, the core of the SDGs, “leaving no one behind” aligns very well with the fairly new inclusive political order that Nepal has been working towards, and the new Constitution (2015) that is built on the aspiration to create a prosperous, egalitarian and pluralistic society. With the SDGs, Nepal focused on alignment, adaptation, and adoption of the goals in the existing development plans and policies. Apart from the periodic plan, other sectoral plans, policies and their targets are also made with the SDGs in mind. The major sectoral plans and policies aligned and mainstreamed with SDGs include School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), Nepal Health Sector Strategy, Zero Hunger Challenges Action Plan, Agriculture Development Strategy, National ICT Broadband Master Plan, Forest Sector Strategy, Nature Conservation National Strategic Framework, Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Development Plan, 20 Year Roads Plan and Five Year Road Sector Strategy, National Tourism Strategic Plan,

National Energy Strategy, and Climate Change Policies (NAPA, Climate Policy and LAPA), among others. Similarly, the “SDG Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030” produced by the National Planning Commission (NPC) serves as a framework for the implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, specific SDGs codes are assigned for all national programs in the national budget and three high-level committees have been formed to help implement the SDGs. As a representation of Nepal’s bona fide commitment to the SDGs, Nepal was one of the first countries to produce a SDG baseline study in 2015, before the formal adoption of the SDGs. Continuous efforts have been made to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plans to achieve the SDGs, with the aspiration of Generating, Sharing and Sustaining the Prosperity²

The SDGs are relevant across all sectors and actors in the country. While the private sector contributes more towards the economic development of the country, significant contributions towards the social development goals have been made by civil society organizations. Both of these non-governmental actors supplement government efforts in achieving the SDGs. Since a large portion of activities under SDGs are to be held at the private sector and other non-government development actors, they should be brought under the monitoring purview of the plan and the SDGs in the future for more effective results.

SDG 5 and its intersection with other goals

While the MDGs tried and went only so far in its aim to achieve gender parity in various sectors, it did lay out a good foundation for the SDGs to work on. As harsh as the realization maybe, we are far from achieving zero discrimination against women and girls. Amidst all the development agendas and efforts, one thing is painstakingly clear: all the SDGs depend on the achievement of SDG 5.³ Gender equality is a prerequisite to bolster economic growth, promote social development and to sustain environmentally conscious prosperity.

Women continue to face discrimination in every aspect of life in Nepal. In the labour market, large inequalities still persist, with women systematically denied the same work rights as men. Women and girls are continuously victims of sexual violence, harrassment and exploitation, whether it be at homes, in public places or at their workplace. Although it has been raised numerous times in economic development discourses, women’s disproportionate contribution to unpaid care, and domestic work, especially in the rural contexts of Nepal, is still not recognized as an economic

contribution, let alone be accounted for in the country's economy. The 2015 earthquake, climate change, and other disasters continue to have a disproportionate effect on women and children, as do conflict and labor migration. Moreover, due to harmful gender stereotypes in a fairly conservative patriarchal society like ours, lesbian, bi and trans women may experience further discrimination and violence because of their intersecting LGBT status and gender. Similarly, disability exacerbates the discrimination, something the government is still heedless towards. All of these issues continue to act as significant barriers to achieving SDG 5 in Nepal.

Although the broader goal is gender equality, Nepal's targets for SDG 5 includes the elimination of wage discrimination, physical/sexual violence, and all harmful social practices, such as child marriages, polygamy, Deuki and Badi customs. Nepal expects women to fill 40 percent of all elected seats in local governments, and at least one-third of the seats in the national parliament. As of now, women hold 33.8 percent of seats in the national parliament, while it is 34.4 per cent in provincial parliaments and 40.75 per cent in local government bodies.⁴ In the civil service, women in public decision-making positions will have increased four-fold of total employees by 2030. Gender equality and social inclusion have been treated as both cross-cutting issues and standalone themes for all planning processes. Currently, Nepal ranks 101 on the WEF's Gender Gap Index⁵: an index that ranks countries according to calculated gender gap between women and men in four key areas: health, education, economy and politics. It measures women's disadvantage compared to men, and is not a measure of equality of the gender gap. Although Nepal is better ranked than other countries in South Asia, Sri Lanka (102nd) and India (112th), it is still behind some like Bangladesh (50th).

Table 1: Summary of SDG, targets, global and national indicators⁶

SDG 5	No. of Global Targets	No. of Global Indicators	No. of Nepal Indicators
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	9	14	22

Gender inequality in Nepal is a deep-rooted issue that manifests through centuries old traditions, ubiquitous patriarchy, and discriminatory social practices. In this light, tackling gender equality will require parallel work

in achieving SDG 16: “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions”. For any country, peace, stability, functional constitutionalism, human rights and effective governance through strengthened and informed institutions based on the rule of law are important conduits for social justice, and a society free from violence and discrimination, and sustainable development. SDG 16 is specifically significant in the context of Nepal because of the country’s post-conflict status and the current process of implementing a new federal structure of governance to establish itself as a federal democratic republic, a result of decades long political struggle and armed conflict. SDG 16 aims ‘to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’ and gender equality is above anything else, the achievement of true social justice and inclusiveness.⁷ The major targets for SDG 16 that overlaps with the targets set for SDG 5 include ending death from violence against women, eliminating marriage before the age of 18 years, and access to justice for all. Furthermore, the targets set to improve transparency and accountability score from a scale of 3 at present to 5, and good governance scale from (–) 0.78 to 2.0 in a scale of –2.5 to 2.5 will keep the state obligation towards gender equality in check.

*“A constitutional guarantee of equality alone is not sufficient to end discrimination and bring equality for all”.*⁸ Although guaranteed by the constitution, women and girls are still considered second-class citizens by discriminatory laws like that of citizenship, and continue to lack an identity devoid of a man (father or husband). To this end, Nepal introduced a specific legislation, i.e. Act to Amend Some Nepal Acts for Maintaining Gender Equality and Ending Gender Based Violence (2015) bringing 88 discriminatory legal provisions in conformity with the principles of gender-equality adopted by the constitution and the CEDAW.⁹ However, women are still struggling to get their rights and position in society while men access it more easily. The fact that only a fraction of women hold land titles in their names illustrates how well women are able to exercise their socio-economic rights. In this light, strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights is key to the process of achieving gender equality. The protection of interests of the women and girls and the mitigation (ideally elimination) of all forms of discrimination require well-functioning constitutional watchdog institutions that promote inclusivity and fair representation. At the core of a decentralized system of governance is the intent to create local representative institutions, and to enable local people to be involved in local development processes and decision-making. In

2017, Nepal conducted local elections to elect a total of 35,041 local representatives. Despite the 50% quota for mayor, chair and deputy positions, and two of the four ward member seats set aside for women, men still outnumbered women both in terms of numbers and executive positions demonstrating how women are able to fill a certain number of posts because of the quotas, but they rarely enjoy positions of power, whether it's the mayor of a town, chair of a rural municipality, or the chair of a ward.¹⁰ Unless there is meaningful participation and equal representation of women in these levels of governance, they can neither be strong, just, or inclusive.

Moreover, all efforts put into securing and promoting the interests of women and girls are in vain in the absence of accountable state institutions, unbiased law enforcement, independent judiciary and corruption free stable political environment. Women and girls are at most risk when it comes to exploitation, sexual violence, unfair economic practices, trafficking, and other societal distress inflicted through discriminatory social practices. Prevalence of such atrocities are more common in post-conflict countries¹¹ like Nepal, thus, highlighting the importance of achieving SDG 16 to achieve SDG 5. On the flipside, unless the country achieves gender equality, peace, justice and well-represented strong institutions cannot be achieved.

The lack of recognition of these kinds of interdependencies and intersectionalities of development goals and accomplishment processes has been one of the core problems in realizing the SDGs in Nepal. SDG 5 and many alike will remain mere ambitious goals if the elected state machinery is not properly activated for the execution of SDGs. The successful election of three tiers of government and formation of a stable government was a pivotal step towards ensuring effective governance and peace building in Nepal.¹² With this achieved, Nepal should now focus on accelerating the localization of SDGs by quickly mainstreaming them into the provincial and local level planning and budgeting systems. As Nepal completes the final year for the 14th periodic plan, which integrates the SDGs fairly well, it is vital that the 15th plan incorporates the spirit of the SDGs at a more granular level. The SDG preliminary report and the updated baseline with goal-wise targets, final list of global SDG indicators and local indicators can be used to mainstream the SDGs in the plans of the federal, provincial and local governments. This report can be used as an indicator-wise baseline and can help track SDGs alignment and progress for the set milestones: 2019, 2022, 2025 and 2030.

Challenges

As general as they may sound, the challenges faced by Nepal in implementing the SDG Goals have been quite consistent since the onset. Primarily, Nepal remains ill-equipped to deliver on over-ambitious domestic targets and indicators as the government remains constrained both financially and politically. Although it has been recognized that strengthening the domestic, financial, policy and human resource base is crucial in fulfilling the SDGs¹³, we continue to face the erosion of political commitment to development. Amidst this unstable political environment and restructuring of the state, ambiguities in the functioning roles of different layers of the government continue to persist along with the challenge of overcoming policy lacunae. Moreover, the lack of resource management and funds on top of an existing deficit aggravates the impediments faced while striving for achieving the goals set. With a myriad of targets and indicators to achieve, Nepal lacks the ability to prioritize some over the other resulting in less drastic changes to report. Measuring and reporting progress has always remained a challenge as we lack a factual baseline, proper systems and indicators that can be measured, and a reliable database system. The dearth of gender disaggregated data often impedes the status reporting of goals such as the SDG 5.

Recommendations

Integrating the global priorities with our own local aspirations through self-regulating mechanisms is undoubtedly the best way to ensure that the SDGs are embraced and prioritized. Under the current decentralized model, it has been realized that putting the local governments as the focal point in setting sector guiding principles is the most effective tool to drive the success of development efforts and sector achievements. Although it has been stated as a strategy, SDGs based periodic planning at all tiers of government needs to be made mandatory. Treating the different SDGs as standalone goals undermines the intertwined relationships between the various economic, social, and environmental issues they are trying to address. To this end, governments need to start thinking in systems in order to realize the intersectionalities, the overlaps, and the need to prioritize some in order to tackle the others. Thus, there is a need to invest in inducing educated and skilled planners, researchers and policy experts into the system of governance (national, provincial, local) such that institutions are strengthened and in a better capacity to devise more efficient programs and interventions.

Moreover, Nepal is rife with CSOs working on different development issues. It is imperative that Nepal realizes the importance of forging effective and efficient partnerships among these civil society members, the provincial and local governments and private sectors to thoroughly realise and embrace the SDGs. Making most of the array of expertise, limited resources and funding, the Government of Nepal should promote collaborations and convergence of programs. If parallel efforts are aligned, we can amplify the geographical reach of such programs, agency interventions, and eliminate fragmentation and duplication.

The national policy and framework on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion mainstreaming has proven to be a milestone achievement for SDG 5. While this achievement is exemplary, the fact that social inclusion in many instances overrides gender equity efforts is often lost in the nuances. For a country so rich in ethnic diversity, placing social inclusiveness and gender equality in the same bracket implies that the marginalized population groups are pitted against each other for the same resources and quotas. Moreover, the National Action Plan process has recognized gender equality and social inclusion as both cross-cutting issues and standalone themes but the government needs to realize that gender equality must be prioritized amongst other SDGs in order to deal with the root of the problem before trying to address the branches. Similarly, all the SDGs should be viewed through a gender lens to address how different genders face issues differently, and all development efforts that go into achieving these goals should periodically be monitored and evaluated to measure the progress and impacts, especially in terms of gender. Gender auditing of macroeconomic policies should be carried out to address discriminatory provisions and practices, mandatory gender responsive budgeting at all levels of governance along with a review of financial institution practices (credit lending, taxation, subsidies) to assess if they are gender friendly and equitable. The progress of gender equality in many sectors alongside many SDG goals and indicators cannot be measured because they do not yet have a quantitative baseline. These recommendations can only be substantiated properly if we have stronger evidence which would require reliable, updated, gender disaggregated data particularly based on new political jurisdictions. If things go as planned and Nepal decides to perform the next National Census in 2021, the government should utilize this opportunity to redress this shortcoming and emphasize on disaggregated data gathering and management, particularly taking into consideration the monitoring requirements of the SDGs and progress mapping.

Conclusion

It cannot be stressed enough that as a development agenda, Gender Equality should be considered both the means and the end rather than being viewed as either the means to an end, or the end itself. The achievement and real sustainability of all the other SDGs in relation to education, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions, depend on gender equality, although the relationship may not be as apparent with some as it is with others. The government should be mindful to make sure that all programmes working on gender equality and violence against women and girls include LGBTQ concerns and address the particular issues faced by lesbian, bi and trans women.

While numerous policies and legislations have been drafted and enacted to bolster economic, social, and environmental development efforts, a meticulous review of these provisions need to be done to ensure policy coherence and assess their suitability for promoting SDGs implementation. Similarly, development efforts and global goals function in isolation if they are not owned and localized. For proper SDG implementation, it is important that the national targets and indicators are integrated into annual plans and budgets of governments at all levels and competent and adequate human resources are provisioned for effective implementation.

Endnotes

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Annex

Details of SDG 5 Targets and Indicators:

* Red tables indicate progress up until 2019, presented in the Voluntary National Review

TABLE 5.5.1: SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Targets and Indicators		Baseline 2015*	Target 2019*	Progress 2019**	Target 2030*
Target 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere					
5.1.1	Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of gender				
1	Wage equality for similar work (ratio of women's wage to that of men)	0.62	0.72	0.66	0.92
2	Gender Inequality Index	0.49	0.38	0.476	0.05
3	Gender Empowerment Measurement (Index)	0.57	0.6	0.62	0.69
Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres					
5.2.1	Violence against women and girls aged 15 years and older by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months				
1	Lifetime physical and/or sexual violence (%)	28.4	22.2	24.3	5
2	Children aged 1-14 years who experienced psychological aggression or physical punishment during the last one month (%)	81.7	59.9	77.6	13.6
5.2.2	Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence				
1	Women aged 15-49 years who experience physical /sexual violence (%)	26	19.1	11.2	6.5
2	Women and girls trafficking (in number)	1697	725	946	325
Target 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation					
1	Women aged 15-19 years who are married or in unions (%)	24.5	18	19.3	4.1

Source: *SDGs Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030; **SDGs Progress Report (2016-2019).

TABLE 5.5.2: SDG 5 - Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities

Targets and Indicators		Baseline 2015*	Target 2019*	Progress 2019**	Target 2030*
5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments				
1	(a) National parliament (%)	29.5	33	33.5	40
	(b) Provincial parliament (%)	-	33	34.4	40
	(c) Local government bodies (%)	-	40.5	40.8	42
5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions				
1	Women's participation in decision-making level in the private sector (%)	25	30.3	29.61	45
2	Women's participation in the cooperative sector (%)	50	50	51	50
3	Women in public service decision-making positions (% of total employees)	11	17	13.6	33
4	Ratio of women to men in professional and technical workers (%)	24	28	25	40
Target 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources					
5.a.1	(a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure				
5.a.1	Number of enterprises owned by women	-	-	247880	
5.a.2	Women's ownership of property (land and house)	26	29.7	33.93	40

Source: *SDGs Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030; **SDGs Progress Report (2016-2019).

Table 5: SDG 5– Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Targets and Indicators	2015	2019	2022	2025	2030	Monitoring Framework			Responsible Agency	
						Sources of Data	Level of Disaggregation	Frequency		
Target 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere										
5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex										
1	Wage equality for similar work (ratio of women's wage to that of men)	0.62 ^f	0.72	0.8	0.87	0.92 ^h	MIS	Subnational	Annual	MOWCSW
2	Gender Inequality Index	0.49 ^g	0.38	0.29	0.2	0.05	NLFS, Time use Survey	Provincial	5 years	MOWCSW/NPC
3	Gender Empowerment Measurement (Index)	0.57 ^g	0.6	0.63	0.66	0.69	NHDR	Subnational	3 years	NPC/UNDP
Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation										
5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age										
1	Lifetime Physical and/or Sexual violence (%)	28.4 ^a	22.2	17.5	12.8	5	NDHS	Provincial	5 Years	MOH
2	Children age 1-14 years who experienced psychological aggression or physical punishment during the last one month (%)	81.7 ^c	59.9	43.6	27.2	13.6	NMICS	Provincial	5 Years	CBS
5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence										
1	Women aged 15-49 years who experience Physical / sexual violence (%)	26 ^b	19.1	13.9	9.7	6.5	NMICS	Provincial	5 Years	CBS
2	Women and Girls Trafficking (in number)	1697 ^b	725	650	425	325	NHRC,MIS	Subnational	Annual	CBS
Target 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation										
5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18										
1	Women aged 15-19 years who are married or in union (%)	24.5 ^c	18	13.1	8.2	4.1	NMICS	Subnational	5 years	CBS
5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age										

Targets and Indicators	2015	2019	2022	2025	2030	Monitoring Framework		
						Sources of Data	Level of Disaggregation	Frequency
Target 5.4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate								
5.4.1	Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location							
1	Ratio of women to men participation in labor force	0.93 ^f	0.95	0.96	0.98	1	Time Use Survey	Subnational 5 years CBS
2	Average hours spent in domestic work by women	14 ^g	11.87	10.27	8.67	6	Time Use Survey	Subnational 5 years CBS
Target 5.5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life								
5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments							
1	(a) national parliament (%)	29.5 ^a	33	34.4	36.5	40	MIS	National/ Subnational/ Local 5 years NEC
	(b) provincial parliament (%)		33	34.4	36.5	40	NEC	National 5 years NEC
	(c) local government bodies (%)		40.5	41	41.5	42	NEC	Provincial 5 years NEC
5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions							
1	Women's participation in decision making level in the private sector (%)	25 ^f	30.3	34.3	38.3	45	MIS	Subnational Annual CBS
2	Women's participation in cooperative sector (%)	50 ^g	50	50	50	50	Economic Census	Subnational Annual MOCP
3	Women in public service decision making positions (% of total employees)	11 ^h	17	21.3	25.7	33	MIS	Subnational Annual MOGA
4	Ratio of women to men in professional and technical workers (%)	24 ^h	28	31	35	40	NLFS	Subnational 5 years CBS
Target 5.6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences								
5.6.1	Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care							
1	Awareness about reproductive rights among girls and women (%) ⁱ - Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care.	59.5 ^a	68	74	80	90	NMICS,NDHS	Subnational 5 years CBS,MOH

Targets and Indicators	2015	2019	2022	2025	2030	Monitoring Framework			Responsible Agency		
						Sources of Data	Level of Disaggregation	Frequency			
2 Receiving specific support and service provisions related to sexual health care to the poor, discriminated and marginalized groups (%)									MOH		
5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education									MOH		
Target 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws											
5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure								Agri Census, NLS/AHS	Subnational	10 years	CBS
5.a.1 Number of enterprises owned by women								Economic Census	Subnational	Annual, 5 years	CBS
5.a.2 Women's ownership of property (land and house)	26 ^a	29.7	32.5	35.3	40			Census, MIS	Subnational, Social Group	Annual, 10 years	CBS, MOLRM, MOWCSW
5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control								MIS			MOWCSW, MOLRM
Target 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women											
5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex								Survey, MIS	Subnational, Gender	Annual, 5 years	MOIC, CBS
5.b.1 Use of internet by women aged 15-24 years (%)	19.6 ^c	40.5	56.2	71.9	98			NMICS, MIS	Provincial	5 years	CBS
Target 5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels											
5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment								MIS	Subnational	Annual	MOF

Sources: a: NPC (2016), b: UNDP (2014), c: CBS (2014b), d: MOGA (2014), e: NDHS (2011), f: Estimation based on labor force census data, g: MOWCSW (2016), h: NDHS (2011)

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Pakistan

Arshi Saleem Hashimi

Executive Summary

Gender Equality/Women Empowerment (SDG 5) and Reducing Inequality (SDG 10) are key indicators to assess the progress of a country for they ensure equality in job, education, health, opportunity to have a say in decision making and no violence on the basis of race, sex, religion or caste. Society moves in the direction of sustainable development, when women have opportunities to make their own choices and raise their voices against injustices. Social and economic disparity between different genders in a society can lead to extreme inequality affecting overall growth. Pakistan with its dismal record of Gender Equality cannot move ahead with its resolve to implement SDGs particularly reducing inequality and dealing with poverty without addressing women empowerment and gender disparity in the country. Social cohesion decreases while violence increases when a society fails to address inequalities. Structural violence in the form of inequality, discriminatory policies and marginalization of women and minorities have a direct link with violent conflicts. These violent conflicts can be at domestic, national or global level. This leads to a vicious cycle of poverty causing increased conflict resulting in more focus on conventional security rather than human security.

Pakistan's economic growth as indicated in its GDP annually is unfortunately not reflected in its Human Development Index (HDI). The major point of concern however is that the Gender Development Index (GDI) is even lower than the HDI; thus inequality exists which leaves significant population without their due share. When we further analyze the low human development index (HDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects women's marginalization in reproductive health, socio-political and economic empowerment and education. Unfortunately there is dearth of gender disaggregated data in many areas and under reporting information. Nevertheless, the available information indicates low literacy,

less opportunities for employment, Child birth related complications and deaths and less access to nutrition for overall health of women.

In Pakistan, gender inequality and women's empowerment issues are related to lack of social understanding and public perception, stereotyping of economically and politically empowered women and aggressive opposition of the clergy to any change in existing norms and practices.

The accommodative approach of successive regimes towards clergy and Tribal/Political representatives barred them to ensure actual implementation of gender equality policies. There seems to be a total disregard by conservative segments of society when it comes to the Constitution of Pakistan which guarantees equality without any discrimination. What is required is the multi dimensional approach to gender and security, and the reframing of approaches to gender mainstreaming at the national level.

Introduction

Women comprise 49% of Pakistani population.¹ The gap between male and female population is very small but the gender gap index places the female on the bottom of socio economic categories. According to Global Gender Gap index, Pakistan is placed at 151 out of 153 countries in 2020². A further assessment in various categories within the Index places Pakistan at 150 in economic participation and opportunity, at 143 in educational opportunity, at 149 in health and at 93 position in political empowerment. The most affected area is Women's health where the gap widened to 94.6%, presenting a gloomy situation of little or no access to health care for women compared to men in different parts of the country particularly rural areas.³

Patriarchal system is deeply rooted in Pakistani society with its many manifestations in various aspects of society. Male dominance is more pronounced in rural and tribal areas where indigenous laws control women's movement and choices. The negative social prejudices and cultural practices and internalization of patriarchy by women themselves has reinforced the continuation of low investment in women's development.

To address these issues, successive Pakistani governments particularly since 1990s initiated some landmark decisions that contributed in developing a framework for women empowerment and equality. Aurat foundation provides a comprehensive list of such initiatives, "starting from setting up of First Women Bank in 1989 and women police stations in 1994; launching the ambitious Lady Health Workers Programme in 1994; setting up of

Commission of Inquiry for Women in 1994 and launching of its Report in 1997; ratification of CEDAW in 1996; launching of National Plan of Action for Women in 1998; establishment of 25 crisis centres for women survivors of violence since 1997 to 2008; establishment of a permanent National Commission on the Status of Women in 2000; launching of National Policy for Development and Empowerment for Women in 2002; introduction of 33% reserved seats for women in local councils and 17% quota of reserved seats for women in national and provincial legislatures in 2000 and 2002, respectively; launching of Gender Reforms Action Plan (GRAP) in 2005; launching of Benazir Income Support Programme, with women as primary beneficiaries, in 2008. Also in 2008, the cross-party Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) was formed in the Federal Parliament. In 2008, the full-fledged Ministry of Human Rights was established giving a new and holistic human rights perspective and dimension to governance structures and institutions.”⁴

Pakistan has signed many international treaties and instruments related to women rights including CEDAW and ratified it in 1996. To implement gender equality and women empowerment, a number of initiatives were taken by successive regimes in Pakistan. A number of issues foregrounded by women activists since 2002, finally got the attention of the government and several other important pro women legislations were passed.

These include: “Amendments in Family Courts Act for khula etc. in 2002. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004 (on ‘honour’ crimes). Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act on Sexual Harassment, 2010 (on sexual harassment) The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2010 and The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011. The Criminal Law (Amendment in Forced Marriages of Children and Minorities Act 2016.”⁵

Moreover, the 11th Five Years Plan (2013-18) by the government of Pakistan⁶ included Women Empowerment and Development in chapter 10 of the document. It highlighted a number of challenges and shared strategies to overcome them. Unfortunately like all previous plans, despite comprehensive reports on the challenges and high hopes for change, most of the promises remain unfulfilled.

The Ministry of Planning and Development, Government of Pakistan has taken some other specific initiatives. OUT OF THE 17 SDGS, THREE PRIORITY CATEGORIES HAVE BEEN CHARTED OUT: ZERO hunger, Good health, Education, clean water, Affordable energy, Decent work and economic growth and Peace, justice and strong institutions are in priority one. Priority two includes, No poverty, Gender equality, Industry and innovation, Reduced inequality, Sustainable cities and Partnership for goals. Priority three has responsible consumption and production, Climate action, Life below water and Life on land.⁷ These priorities show that both Gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities SDG (10) are considered secondary.

SDG 5 and its intersection with other goals

SDG 5 on women empowerment and gender equality goes hand in hand with SDG 10 on reducing inequality. Inequality in a society can only be reduced when all segments of society have access to basic human rights that includes right to livelihood. Gender equality and women empowerment has contributed significantly in reducing inequality in the developed world. Countries where social and cultural practices have kept women reduced to few “tasks”, remain economically and socially under developed. In today’s Pakistan, the increasing participation of women in workforce in urban areas including public and private institution is encouraging, however, women empowerment is still neglected in rural socio-political setup of Pakistan particularly in conservative parts of the country where prevalent practices make it difficult for young girls to utilize their full potential.

The SDG 10 can only be achieved when SDG 5 is fully implemented. Economic and social empowerment of women has a direct relationship with reducing overall inequality in the country. Similarly, access to education for all, particularly young girls is a significant indicator how a country deals with inequality in its society. Unfortunately due to lack of implementation of SDG 5, women suffer not only within the domestic space but their contribution to the society is very low compared to their potential. The HRCP *State of Human Rights in 2019 report* states that, “Women continued to bear the brunt of society’s fixation with ‘honour’, with Punjab accounting for the highest proportion of ‘honour’ crimes”.⁸

It is quite ironic that absence of “anti women” policies is considered an achievement, not realizing that this significant segment of the society needs proactive enforcement mechanism for safeguards against established practices in the name of honour and values.

For the marginalized groups in Pakistan, gender inequality often means a lack of access to essential services and denial of their rights. It is a key driver for inequality and poverty. According to Oxfam, “gender justice means full equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life, resulting in women jointly, and on an equal basis with men, defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. Transforming gender and power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, is critical to ending poverty and challenging inequality.”⁹

Pakistan has seen a significant improvement in constitutional safeguards for women but implementation and behaviour changes in the society are still challenging tasks that require more action with both top down and bottom up approaches. According to the Constitution of Pakistan, “Article 25 provides equality of citizen before law without any discrimination; on gender discrimination Article 27 states that no citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of sex ...” and Article 34 stipulates that steps should be taken to ensure “full participation of women in all spheres of national life.”¹⁰

Through a unanimous resolution of the Parliament on February 16, 2016, SDGs were adopted as part of national development agenda. A special SDG secretariat was established at the National Assembly. To localize the SDGs, this was an important policy initiative for mainstreaming the process. With the 18th constitutional amendment, the social service functions are now devolved to provincial level. A program “National Initiative for SDGs” with a dedicated SDGs Section in the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoP&SI)¹¹ has been established to monitor and coordinate as a national coordinating entity. The MoP&SI along with Provincial Planning & Development Departments in collaboration with UNDP has initiated SDG support units for institutionalization of Agenda 2030. The Ministry of Planning stresses on consultation process for localization of the SDGs through data collection and monitoring.

Some of the key decisions taken for women empowerment at the Federal and Provincial levels include land/property ownership for women, crisis centres for needy women, day care facilities for working women with children, ensuring women presence in decision making bodies in government departments. Some of the major programs for women initiated by successive regimes include Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)

which is now renamed as Ehsaas program by the present government. Another economic empowerment initiative for women is National Rural Support Program (NRSP), Committee on Transgender issues is a significant initiative, that led to inclusion of third gender in National Identity card and job opportunities for transgenders in different departments. Parliament passed the bill and a new law protecting the rights of transgender persons. The establishment of First Women Development Bank was a significant step for women empowerment. Each province has women development department empowered to work for gender equality under 18th Constitutional Amendment. National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) is another government body to deal with gender equality and women empowerment. It deals with review of gender policies, gives recommendation to the government, works with women legislators on political participation and pro women legislations. Young girls' literacy drive is another area where NCSW works in collaborations with NGOs and CBOs. NCSW has also been actively engaged with UN Women and national NGO Shirkat Gah on national consultations on SDGs.¹²

Ministry of Human Rights and Ministry of Law and Justice have also been active on disseminating information regarding SDGs particularly Women /Gender equality. At the government level, in collaboration with civil society and international development organizations, awareness campaigns and budget allocation have been planned. The focus has been on employment opportunities, one policy initiative is a ten percent quota in jobs for women.

Federal government allocated the funds for SDG 5 particularly as Dawn reported, "For fiscal year 2017-18, Rs675m had been allocated for women's development sector. Up to Rs210m have been allocated for the Punjab Working Women Endowment Fund as the ODP and Rs100m for the Punjab Commission on the Status for Women and for research and surveys pertaining to gender issues as the ODP."¹³ Some of the initiatives last government announced included public awareness on women's rights through mass media and Punjab government announced capacity building of women councillors under the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2016.

In the non-government sector, a few think tanks in the country have taken up the issue of gender gap and, inequality along with other SDGs. Their websites provide information material and details of their activities. For example, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) have many SDGs related issues including Women empowerment listed as their program of action.

Pakistan People's Party has initiated several programs under public-private partnership for soft skills and vocational training for women, organised jointly by the Paxi Pink Taxi Service, Institute of Advancing Career and Talents (IACT) and Habib Foundation in Karachi.¹⁴

Some of the CSOs that have incorporated SDG 5 include “Pakistan State Oil which has been supporting Behbud Association, a national NGO working in the field of reproductive health, community development, education, vocational training, to uplift the underprivileged sections of society. Moreover, Pakistan State Oil (PSO) also assists Rashid Memorial Welfare Organization which carries out Education, Health, and Vocational Training for females and orphans and takes poverty alleviation measures. By providing financial assistance to this organisation, PSO aids the substantive development of a large proportion of rural population.”¹⁵

Very few corporate sector companies take gender equality as social responsibility. Serena Hotels in Pakistan is the first such hotel chain that has obtained Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) Certification. Along with global companies with corporate social responsibility as their motto, Serena hotels has initiated programs for gender equality and women empowerment through employment. Serena supports a CDR initiative “Karighar” that provides entrepreneurship training to women to improve their quality of life and for an overall sustainable growth in the country.¹⁶

Kashf Foundation a local NGO working in the field of microfinance, in collaboration with Coca Cola initiated a program in 2010 to encourage women for economic empowerment particularly in rural areas of Pakistan.¹⁷ The collaboration has resulted in women empowerment through self reliance.

Despite constitutional safeguards, legislations, special programs and public-private partnership for women, the situation on ground is still far from ideal. As stated by the Human Right Watch report 2019, “Violence against women and girls—including rape, so-called honour killings, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remains a serious problem.”¹⁸ Pakistani activists estimate that there are about 1,000 “honor” killings every year.¹⁹ Among many challenges in the implementation of pro women policies is the fact that opponents of these reforms call it foreign agenda. Even when local NGOs highlight the problem and mobilize support for policy changes, they are called foreign agents attacking the traditional values

and tearing the social fabric apart. These views have considerable support among the conservative sections of the society particularly in the rural areas. The successive governments succumbing to such views and not standing with the local NGOs has been the biggest hurdle in this regard.

All successive governments have focused on top down change rather than bottom up. One of the steps crucial for women empowerment is political participation of women. Regrettably, the decision to reserve seats for women in the parliament resulted in women from political families contesting and winning election from their family constituencies. Women who do not come from political families find it challenging to get elected to local bodies, provincial or national assembly.

Key SDGs: Progress and Gaps in Implementation

Pakistan's key priorities related to SDG 5

According to SDG secretariat, National Assembly of Pakistan following priorities are set for SDG 5:²⁰

- Effectively monitoring progress on the implementation of gender-responsive policy frameworks;
- Creating structures to further support women in the labour market;
- Establishing systems and structures to scientifically develop, implement, monitor and evaluate behavioral change communication interventions to promote gender parity at all levels;
- Encouraging women entrepreneurs;
- Strengthening structures to combat violence against women

Progress Indicators

Federal and provincial governments have taken a strong stance by introducing multiple initiatives to address gender parity. Many of these have received highly favorable feedback, such as the establishment of toll-free women helpline in Punjab, Bolo Helpline, women-only police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the creation of training and rehabilitation centers in Sindh and across the country. National and provincial Commissions on the Status of Women have been at the forefront of efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Maternity Benefits Act has been amended at the national and provincial levels. In addition to provincial Domestic Violence Protection

and Prevention Act, Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Acts have also been passed. Child Marriage Act establishes a minimum age for marriage to curb the practice of early and child marriages.

Some progress has been made in achieving SDG 5.5.1 regarding **Proportion of women in work force** particularly in decision making positions. Government made some efforts on proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments) and 5.5.2 (Proportion of women in managerial positions). These efforts began with the collection and reporting of gender-disaggregated data, alongside quota setting for women's employment in the public sector, and the requirement that women must have at least 33 per cent representation on the boards of statutory bodies and public sector organizations.

A Gender Management Information System was launched in Punjab, while Sindh **developed a Gender Reforms Action Plan (GRAP)**. Funds were allocated by both provinces for the establishment of day care centers at workplaces.

To address **gender inequalities in policy design**, programme planning, budgeting, resource allocation and trainings are organized for public sector officials on gender responsive budgeting. These aim to ensure that policy-makers understand gender issues and nuances, while making conscious efforts to facilitate the achievement of women's rights and economic empowerment.

Major Legislations	<p>Some of the major legislations relevant to SDG 5 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011 Prevention of Anti-Women Practice Act 2011 Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offenses in the name or pretext of honour) Act 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 Hindu Marriage Act 2017 The Punjab Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act, 2012 Punjab Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 2015 Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 Punjab Women Protection Authority Act, 2017
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	<p>Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013</p> <p>Sindh Child Marriage Restraints Act, 2013</p> <p>Amendments to Section 338 of the Penal Code amended by Criminal Law (Amendment Act No. 1 of 2005)</p> <p>Reproductive Healthcare and Rights Act 2013</p> <p>The Punjab Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health Authority Act 2014</p> <p>Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act, 2014</p> <p>Punjab Land Revenue Amendment Act 2015</p> <p>Punjab Family Courts (Amendment) Act, 2015</p> <p>Punjab Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Act 2015</p> <p>The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2015</p> <p>The KP Enforcement of Women Ownership Rights Act, 2012</p> <p>The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Maternity Benefit Act, 2013 with (Amendment 2015)</p> <p>The Anti-Honour Killings Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2014 (passed by the Senate only)</p> <p>The Anti-Rape Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2013 (passed by the Senate only)</p> <p>The Torture, Custodial Death and Custodial Rape (Punishment) Act, 2014 (passed by the Senate only)</p>
<p>Anti-Harrassment laws</p>	<p>Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010</p> <p>Prevention of Electronic Crime Act 2016</p> <p>Insulting modesty or causing sexual harassment: Pakistan Penal Code Section 509</p> <p>Misconduct in public by a drunken person: Pakistan Penal Code Section 510</p> <p>Obscene acts and song: Pakistan Penal Code 294</p>
<p>Inheritance laws</p>	<p>The Hindu Law of Inheritance (Amendment) Act, 1929</p> <p>The Hindu Inheritance (Removal of Disabilities) Act, 1928</p> <p>Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 (VIII of 1961)</p> <p>Section 498A, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Transfer of Property Act, 1882</p>

	<p>Registration Act, 1908</p> <p>Land Revenue Act, 1976</p>
Domestic violence	<p>Hurt: Section 332, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Itlaf-e-udw: Section 333, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Punishment for Itlaf-e-udw: Section 334, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Itlaf-i-slahiyyat-udw: Section 335, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Punishment for Itlaf-i-slahiyyat-udw: Section 336, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Shajjah: Section 337, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p>
Acid and burn crimes	<p>Hurt caused by corrosive substance: Section 336-A, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Punishment for hurt by corrosive substance: Section 336-B, Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p>
Dowry-Related Violence	<p>The Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act 1976</p>
Sexual offences	<p>Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty: Section 354 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Assault or use of criminal force to woman and stripping her of her clothes: Section 354-A of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Rape: Section 375 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Punishment of Rape: Section 376(2) of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Disclosure of identity of victim of rape, etc.: 376(A) of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860</p> <p>Unnatural offences: Section 377 of the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860</p>
Family laws	<p>The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929</p> <p>Muslim Family Law Ordinance, 1961</p> <p>Christian Marriage Act 1872</p> <p>Divorce Act 1869</p> <p>The Hindu Marriage Act 2017</p>

	Family Courts Act, 1964 Special Marriage Act, 1872
Laws of transgender	Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018
Female infanticide	Section 328, Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 Concealment of birth by secret disposal of dead body: Section 329, Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 Punishment of qatl-e-amd: Section 302, Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 Section 299 (ee), Pakistan Penal Code, 1860

Issues in Enforcement of legislations

When it comes to implementation of certain legislation and its enforcement there are gaps that need to be addressed for SDG 5, for instance:

In **Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016**, though the biggest province with 60% population, its scope is still limited compared to Sindh's Domestic Violence Act 2013.

Sindh's Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013 has a more robust definitional scope and includes other vulnerable persons such as senior citizens, differently able bodied persons and children. While it does set out to protect women from violence, the Punjab Act could be reviewed to include these additional definitions and broaden its scope to become more inclusive and comprehensive.

Sindh government has **Sindh Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013** which is comprehensive but an amendment should be made in Section 5 of DV (P&P) Act 2013 to make offences cognizable and non-bailable for police. In Schedule II of the Cr.PC, amendments should be made to clarify either the relevant Protection Officer of WDD or a Police Station will first take cognizance of the offences.²¹

When it comes to Child marriage, amendments are required in **Sindh Child Marriage Restraints Act, 2013**. It should be amended to address the gaps and lacunas in implementation of laws, such as, invalidation (dissolution) of child marriages and penalization of consummation under 16 years of age in line with Section 375(V) of PPC. Section 10 (5) of

Rules of the SCMRA-2013 should be revised and the word ‘husband’ may be deleted from the clause.

Women’s health is one major priority of SDG 5, in this regard **Amendment was made to Section 338 of the Penal Code amended by Criminal Law (Amendment Act No.1 of 2005)** but its implementation is still a far cry because of several reasons, for example, the phrase necessary treatment is not clearly defined, or widely understood, and safe and legal abortion care is not widely accessible. Abortion-related stigma, the narrow legal grounds for abortion, and the lack of understanding or clarity in interpreting and implementing the law by both women and health care providers means that women often resort to clandestine and unsafe procedures that result in death or adverse health consequences. However, it is worth investigating whether the vague nature of the clause provides greater legal latitude for women seeking an abortion or is detrimental to reforms. While legal under the law, there is still work to be done. The focus must be put on building capacity, process and infrastructure to provide safe abortion access and adequate post-abortion care.²²

The Khyber Pakhtunkhawn is the most conservative province of Pakistan which needs additional political will to initiate any women relate legislations. The Assembly introduced **the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Maternity Benefit Act, 2013 with (Amendment 2015)**. The issue with this act is that the penalties for violations of the Act are not strong enough to be seen as deterrents. Additional measures need to be created to ensure compliance with the Act, such as stiffer fines, penalties, prosecution of cases, reporting mechanisms, and so forth.

SDG 5 Indicators and Gaps

As per the SDG secretariat report, following targets have not been achieved:

Law mandating equal pay for males and females – Legislation Missing

Legislation explicitly criminalize marital rape – Legislation Missing

The law prohibit or invalidate child marriage – Legislation Missing

Systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment (As of 2018 No Data For Pakistan)

Recommendations

Pakistani women have been raising their voice for gender equality and women empowerment for decades. Anti women laws or practices were rejected by women activists who took it upon themselves to continue their struggle for equality. Some of the prominent organizations which have been on the frontline despite all odds include Women Action Forum (WAF). These organizations have not only advocated equal rights but have very actively mobilised women against anti-women legislations in the name of Islamization. It took them decades to finally get the government to amend Hudood ordinance in 2007. Similarly Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation PILER and many other NGOs presented recommendations to the government to respond to social, legal and economic injustices against women.

Public perception can be addressed through use of TV dramas, films and lectures by clerics on TV, highlighting the positive aspect of girls education and contribution of women in work force. Taboos attached to working women need to be rejected by the projecting positive images of educated working women who take care of their families, can be mothers and yet professionally contribute to society. Examples from low income families in villages, small town and cities can be shared and encouraged to respond to the social stereotypes of educated working women.

To achieve SDG 5, public-private partnership is crucial.

Some of the most important policy recommendations to implement already formulated programs and legislations could be:

- Enforcement machinery to be made gender sensitive to improve implementation.
- Media's role is important to help the society "un-learn" some of the existing discriminatory and stereotypical practices and create acceptance and understanding through popular TV series, lectures by religious scholars and not "TV-Evangelicals".
- Capacity building of Tribal and community elders to develop understanding about cruel cultural, familial and customary norms.
- Ensuring pro women environment for women employees by addressing the gap in male-female ratio and induction of female employees in decision making positions.
- Policy research with follow ups to measure improvement in implementation of certain initiatives.

- For a specific period of time , reserve seats for female work force to enhance the number in both government and corporate sector.
- It should be made mandatory for registration of any political party , or renewal of registration in case of already established political parties to have significant percentage of women members at all levels from decision making core committees to party worker level.
- Monitoring committees at community, district and provincial level to ensure implementation of women related laws from police stations to courts.
- Similar neighbourhood watch community based groups can be empowered by the government to report incidence of harassment/ sexual crimes within family or area.
- Many crimes against women remain unreported due to the nature of social structure where domestic violence is still considered a family issue not to be reported. For such cases, neighbourhood watch committees can help in reporting to district data bank and a national database should be developed based on provincial data.
- Gender responsiveness should be included and highlighted in budget.
- Gender awareness and equality should be included in curricula of schools, universities and
- Other educational institutions to create empathy about the Gender inequality being a social problem and not anti religion or anti social/ culture initiative.
- Along with free access to legal aid all over the country, awareness programs for women about existing pro women legislation should be initiated at high school, college and university level as well as community based organizations can be supported to help rural women understand their rights in local, simple language.
- In Rural areas where women work as unpaid helpers with the family, they should have access to government supported skills development on livestock, agriculture, handicraft etc. for economic empowerment.
- Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) should be mandatory for government policy documents related to human development.

Conclusion

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment is essential for Pakistan's development and stability. Gender equality is an important indicator for not only social and economic development but it is significant for overall security and stability of a country. To reduce overall inequality, women empowerment and gender equality has a crucial place as it has far reaching implications on peace and stability.

Violence against women is an indicator of whether society as a whole is prone to violent conflict. The larger the gender gap, the greater the likelihood that a country will be involved in a conflict. To reverse the process of growing inequality at all levels, government needs to shift its priorities towards a model premised on social justice, fairness and sustainability. Once the policy focus shifts towards social acceptance of the significance of women's role in decision making and access to resources for health, education: economic opportunities and political participation, Pakistan will be in a better position to realize sustainable development goals.

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Sri Lanka

Swarna Sumanasekara

Executive Summary

The Government of Sri Lanka has taken several measures towards facilitating the implementation of SDGs through establishing a Parliamentary Select Committee to review progress and provide policy guidance, establishing the then Ministry of Sustainable Development and wild Life for coordination and facilitating SDG implementation, and enacting Sustainable Development Act to provide institutional mechanisms for implementation of the SDG Framework. The Policy Framework of the country, the Vision 2025, Public Investment Plan (2017-2020) and the 2018 Budget have integrated economic, social and environmental dimensions in varying degrees. The Assessment carried out by the UNDP has revealed that most of the targets align with the National Development Framework and mostly with the theme Prosperity which covers economic development.

SDG 5 provides guidance for gender equality in total while Targets 5.4 and 5.a directly deal with female poverty. Targets 1.2,1.3and 1.4 of Goal 1 are extremely relevant to the Sri Lankan context as it aims to reduce extreme and multi-dimensional poverty, emphasizing the need for a social protection system and accessing economic resources including inheritance to land. SDG 1.2urges the governments to reduce women living in poverty by half and therefore it is justifiable to expand the current poverty alleviation programme by increasing the number of female beneficiaries.

The two strategies proposed for reducing poverty alleviation includes strengthening the government poverty alleviation programme and to provide support services to rise as entrepreneurs and working towards developing policies and introduce laws for the removal of structural barriers impeding women's economic participation. This is proposed as a joint program of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs MWCA and the Samurdhi Authority. The MWCA needs to strengthen its gender mainstreaming capacity in order to create gender sensitivity among the policy makers to

draw their support for policy changes and allocation of resources. The support of the CSOs will be harnessed to get their services at various stages and utilize their resources for advocacy initiatives.

Introduction

This report focuses on SDG 5, its implementation within Sri Lanka and its interconnection with SDG 1 in the light of the current policies, national and subnational level data, existing mechanisms and provides recommendations in improving Sri Lanka's gender equality while addressing poverty which remains as a barrier in achieving the former.

The Government of Sri Lanka has taken several important measures, particularly at the policy level, to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) since 2015. The Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife (MSDW) was established as the lead Ministry responsible for coordinating, monitoring and supervision of the implementation of SDGs in Sri Lanka. The Sustainable Development Act No. 19 was enacted in 2017 providing the legal framework to implement the SDGs using the existing public institutional system. The Sustainable Development Council established under this Act, is responsible for formulating national policies and providing guidance to new development projects. Furthermore, a Parliamentary select committee has been established to facilitate the implementation of SDGs through reviewing, providing advisory services, coordinating activities with the parliament and the respective Ministries. A Presidential Task Force has also been appointed to draft a vision for 2030.

The Policy framework covering Vision 2025, Public Investment Programme (2017–2020) and the Blue Green Budget of 2018 have integrated social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in varying degrees. The Vision 2025 highlights the government vision, making Sri Lanka a prosperous country by 2025 where all citizens can achieve higher income and enjoy a higher standard of living. PIP includes strengthening the economy and promoting investment and infrastructure development as means of accelerating economic growth. The Budget 2018 was focused on a Blue – Green economic programme towards adopting new and sustainable technologies to reduce environmental risks and ecological imbalances.

Two studies conducted by the UNDP and the Department of National Planning analyze the alignment between SDGs and the government policies.

The study conducted by UNDP has revealed that 16 Targets (9%) are not applicable to the country’s policy development, 44 Targets (26%) though relevant have been identified as not aligned. Out of the 109 aligned Targets 64 (38%) have been identified as fully aligned and the balance 45 Targets (27%) as partially aligned. The degree of alignment of the SDGs with the PIP is as follows.

<i>The degree of alignment</i>	<i>SDG Goals</i>
100%	SDG1
89%-60%	SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 7, SDG 11
60%-40%	SDG 3, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10, SDG 12

On the request of the National Planning Department all public agencies have identified relevant SDG indicators applicable to their subject areas and have included them in their annual action plans.

The institutional mechanism entails that the Sustainable Development Council prepare the National Policy and Strategy for Sustainable Development and after obtaining approval of the Parliament all line Ministries and sub national agencies prepare Sustainable Development Strategies within their scope in line with the Policy.

While the Ministries have undertaken mainstreaming SDGs into policy and planning, service delivery is conducted by Provincial Councils/ District/ Divisional Secretariats and village office units. Funds for the SDG activities are provided through the government budget, and the implementation of the SDGs are carried out through the existing public financing, monitoring and evaluation procedures. Monitoring the SDG activities is done by the Department of Project Management and Monitoring by collecting information regularly from relevant authorities. The Auditor General’s Department has initiated steps towards taking SDGs into the purview of the government’s auditing process. Further, a structured framework for reporting the development activities carried out by Provincial Councils under relevant SDG targets has been developed by the Finance Commission.

The support of the non-state actors was obtained by appointing them to the Consultative Committee on Sustainable Development Implementation. They were further consulted on the preparation of Voluntary National Report. Additionally, a stakeholder engagement plan was also prepared to trigger a participatory and inclusive stakeholder engagement process.

The United Nations agencies have provided technical and financial support for the implementation of the SDGs and have built strong relationships with the government and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The Sri Lanka SDG Platform was established in March 2018 by a collective of CSOs, private sector, academia and Professional Organizations and has prepared the Voluntary Peoples Review which was presented at the UN High Level Platform Forum 2018.

SDG 5 and its intersection with Goal 1

Current status of the Targets in Goal 5

The government has recognized gender equality and empowerment of women as a key priority area and has taken measures to address such through Constitutional provisions and by meeting treaty obligations as well as achieving gender related indicators given in the Sustainable Development Goals. A national gender policy and action plan has been drafted addressing gender issues and challenges including recommendations to make women equal partners in sustainable development. Sri Lanka has made progress in many fields related to women's empowerment reflected in impressive social indicators especially on women's health and education. Despite these achievements it has been difficult to overcome the structural barriers that impedes women's equality.

In Sri Lanka amongst several issues of concern for women two critical issues that continues are female poverty and prevalence of violence against women.

The incidences of gender based violence is high specially related to domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Statistics reveal that 28% of women experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. Cases of violence are under reported.

Legal framework is in place in respect of violence related offences and law enforcement agencies are active in addressing the issue. However, women are reluctant to file complaints due to social stigma and fear of intimidation. According to the Department of Health Services (2016), of the women who were subjected to violence by their partners: less than one third had sought help. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is deeply concerned about combatting violence against women and has established 331 Women and Children's Units at the divisional level to provide protection, care and guidance and to resolve issues related to violence. Six

support shelters where women can seek temporary refuge have been established at the District level and the Women's National Helpline (1938) and the direct phone line of the Unit provide legal and psychological support for the victims.

The Government has taken special measures to prevent trafficking in persons especially women by becoming a party to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Punish and Suppress Trafficking in Persons, establishing a National Human Task Force and developing 5 year Strategic Plan to monitor and combat Human Trafficking.

In addition to the women in the formal labour force of the country, there are women working in the informal sector who are functioning as unpaid care workers. They are categorized as economically inactive as they are unable to participate in work categorized as formal under the labour regulations of the country. According to the statistics (DCS) 64% of the employed females are doing informal jobs, a determinant of gender inequalities at work. Female labour force participation is low which is enumerated as 35.9% in 2016 despite their higher educational attainment well into tertiary level in comparison to their male counterparts. The society tends to give more value to the role played by women as mothers than the role they play as workers. A Time use survey was initiated in 2020 by the Department of Census and Statistics to enumerate data on women's contribution to household work as well as the contribution made to Gross Domestic Product. This is the first such survey in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka infrastructure is treated as a gender-neutral entity and less attention is paid to integrate gender into infrastructure projects except in projects funded by donors, such as projects on energy and transport. Women's participation has been enhanced in rural water and sanitation projects implemented by the government of Sri Lanka.

Over 80% of the total social protection expenditure goes to the retirement benefits of formal workers including women. Around 30% of those working in the informal sector are covered by the government social protection programs through cash transfer programs for low income families and disability payment for elders over 70 years of age. Expenditure in social assistance programs remains low which is meant for those in the informal sector. Poverty alleviation programs are also included under the social protection programme of the government.

Women who are engaged in paid work bear the responsibility for taking care of the household and the family due to traditional gender roles practiced within the country. The advocacy programs carried out for breaking stereotyping have little impact on sharing household work.

The structural barriers have affected women's participation at highest decision making levels including participation in public bodies. Representation of women in the last Parliament and the Provincial Councils were at 5.2% and 3.9% respectively despite women being the majority of the population (52%). Allocation of 25% quota for women in local government is a victory for women after the achievement of universal franchise in 1931. Women are also poorly represented at senior levels of public sector. It is estimated that only 10% of high positions in the government sector are occupied by women. The ratio of men and women is 6:1 at the highest decision making levels.

Sri Lankans fertility decline was largely due to its relatively easy and sufficient access to education and health services which facilitated a rapid decline in maternal and infant mortality rates and major gains in life expectancy. Teenage pregnancy and motherhood has remained a major health and social concern. Demographic and Health Survey 2016 reveals that most of the child bearing in teen ages occurs in the rural sector and among poorest groups. Percentage of teenage mothers less than 20 years of age has gradually decreased from 6.5% in 2010 to 4.9% in 2014. Almost all ever married women in reproductive age have heard about family planning methods. National level contraceptive prevalence is 65% as per the Demographic and Health Survey 2016.

Interconnection with Goal 1

SDG 5 on Gender Equality has a close relationship with SDG 1 on poverty alleviation in the Sri Lankan context. Targets 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 directly align with targets 5.1, 5.4 and 5.6 of Gender equality targets which promotes gender equality, improving labour force participation, recognizing the value of unpaid care work and ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health. The structured inequalities in Target 1.4 in SDG 1 and Target 5.a in Goal 5 are somewhat similar. Therefore wide opportunities are foreseen in reducing female poverty by recognizing its overlaps with Goal 5. Women's economic empowerment contributes in achieving sustainable development goals.

The Income and Expenditure Survey 2015/2016 reveals that the proportion of population below the poverty line has declined from 6.7% to 4.1%. The

female poverty line is lower (3.9%) than males (4.1%). Gini coefficient inequality has not declined despite declining in poverty. Women's unemployment rate is twice that of men which is 6.5% for women and 3.1% for men in 2015. Female labour force participation has never reached up to 40%. Unemployment among the poor women has doubled despite their higher education attainments since they lack marketable skills. The wage gap between men and women in the informal sector is large and not covered by any legislation. Women mostly work as agriculture producers where earnings are meagre. They are also not treated as farmers but as farm hands. Women continue to undertake most of unpaid care work which has been a challenge in their efforts to engage in productive work. The notion of equal pay for work of equal value is not adhered to in the informal sector. Compared to men women lack access to resources especially regarding inheritance to land particularly those who are not governed by the general law of the country.

Poverty alleviation is one of the priority areas of the government and the strategy adopted in alleviating poverty is through support to the poor for livelihood access. Although no research data is available it is reported that only 10% of women have risen as entrepreneurs. Lack of inputs, technical skills and knowledge on marketing are identified as weaknesses in these programs.

Access to resources is a major ingredient in women's economic empowerment. There are many loan schemes operated by the government, state and private banks. However due to tight procedural requirements of banks women prefer to obtain loans from micro financial organizations as it provides easy credit. Due to the lack of security and laws governing the microfinance sector, women borrowers often fall into difficulties. Lacking financial literacy, when women are unable to pay the dues in time, they lose property and valuables; are asked for sexual favours in exchange of the dues; in some unfortunate incidences even attempt/commit suicide.

Women's access to land is limited despite that general law of the country is neutral. Advocacy is continuing on joint ownership to land.

Proposal for a Joint programme for poverty alleviation

The major poverty alleviation programme of the government is the Samurdhi programme catering to 1.8 million people in the country. The programme comprises of provision of consumption grant, savings and credit for entrepreneurial activities and rehabilitation and development of

country's infrastructure. There are 1074 Samurdhi Banks and 331 Samurdhi Bank societies in operation island wide that provide micro credit for low income families. The MWCA is currently implementing a livelihood programme for women at the grassroots level with limited financial resources. Women's societies are established at the village level for self-help and to facilitate government outreach to women at the village level. However, of those engaged in livelihood activities around 10% have risen as entrepreneurs.

For alleviation of poverty it is proposed to implement a joint programme by the Ministry of Social Empowerment in which the Samurdhi Authority is located and with the MWCA. The main objective of Samurdhi Authority is to eliminate poverty in Sri Lanka mainly through the inclusion of low income households and providing support for economic improvement. The Samurdhi Authority is well equipped to undertake livelihood development projects while MWCA is mandated to work on issues related to women's poverty.

Activities of MWCA is spread out from the national level to the Divisional level with Women Development Officers attached to each Divisional secretariat to work on women's empowerment. The Samurdhi Authority has a wide network of national and local level officers administering its activities. Field staff is available with Samurdhi to supervise and implement the projects while obtaining technical support for strengthening the projects. The proposed project could reach out to a larger clientele with the additional resources received through the government and the donors. MWCA need to conduct capacity development programs to create gender sensitivity among the officers dealing with poverty alleviation. The capacity of the MWCA should also be strengthened to work on gender poverty related issues.

While working towards livelihood development, women could be sensitized on structural gender issues to raise their voice collectively for policy changes and law reforms. Gradually their leadership capacity will be enhanced. Most importantly, they can play a catalytic role in reducing gender based violence.

Recommendations

Poverty alleviation is a major area in the development agenda of the government which is also been highlighted in the Election Manifesto of the government in power. Providing support for female income generation is within the strategy included under social development.

Harnessing the strengths of the MWCA and the Samurdhi Authority is proposed to enhance women's economic participation and remove structural barriers which impedes their economic participation. The programs available lack coordination and monitoring and face financial constraints in strengthening and expanding the programs. These programs are seldom subjected to evaluation and lack innovative approaches. The attention given by the state authorities to the removal of structural barriers is inadequate except for the efforts of the CSOs. These issues needs to be addressed in the proposed policy framework which aims to enhance women's economic participation while addressing the structural barriers.

National level

1. A feasibility study is to be conducted for developing a policy framework for a joint programme through a multi sectoral approach by an independent organization. Views of the community should be obtained through Focus Group Discussions
2. To conduct a SWOT analysis in both the proposed implementing agencies in order to get clear insights on their capacities and gaps.
3. Developing a policy framework by the independent organization in consultation with the stakeholders including the Department of National Planning and the Department of National Budget. Partnership to be developed with these two Ministries to obtain approval for the framework.
4. The draft policy framework needs to be discussed with the line Ministries to get their views on the draft while a similar discussion to be held with the CSOs. A strong policy commitment to be made at the highest level. The Select Committee of Parliament on the SDG agenda to review the progress and provide advisory services for the implementation of the programme.
5. Inclusion of the proposal in the next Public Investment Plan while the two Ministries to include it in their annual action plans

6. MWCA and the Samurdhi Authority to liaise with donor agencies supporting income generation as well as on gender issues for funding
7. Constitute a group of experts, academics, officials and CSOs to advise and direct on planning, implementing and monitoring of the programme
8. MWCA to prepare a capacity development plan with customized modules for different stakeholders on gender, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting and conduct training for the officers in relevant Ministries and institutions to create awareness on substantive gender equality to assist them in designing gender sensitive policies and plans.
9. The Ministry to organize advocacy programs to remove discriminatory policies, laws and regulations that have an adverse impact on women's economic participation, such as formulation of a gender responsive social protection system covering women working in the informal sector, giving value to unpaid care work and encourage sharing of household responsibilities, providing marketable skills for young women and ratifying ILO Conventions to protect the rights of the workers in the informal sector.
10. Institutional strengthening through capacity development of the MWCA staff at national and divisional levels.

Divisional level

1. Samurdhi officers and Women Development Officers to plan out the activities jointly and develop a clear eligible criterion for selection of the beneficiaries in order to be free from political interferences.
2. Provide training in technical and management skills, access to technology, market information for self-employed women to enable them to move upwards from their poverty status.

Civil Society Organizations

1. Women Development Officers to organize awareness raising programs for both women and men at the grass root level on issues related to women's economic empowerment and facilitating advocacy programmes.
2. Consultation of CSOs involved in gender to get their inputs for the feasibility study, development of the policy framework and utilize their resources for training and advocacy programs at the grassroots level.

United Nation and other donors

1. Providing technical assistance for the feasibility study and providing financial support for the preparation of the policy framework and sponsoring activities.

Conclusion

The effort of the government to create gender equality is underscored by the commitment made to implement Goal 5 on gender equality which is cross cutting. Targets given in SDG 5 and SDG 1 align in respect of eliminating female poverty relevant to Sri Lankan context which needs to be addressed by the government. It is proposed to expand and strengthen the government poverty alleviation programs focusing on female poverty while addressing structural issues obstructing women's economic participation. However, implementation requires integrating the Targets into the country's policies and plans. Successful implementation of the SDGs requires commitment of the relevant Ministries and institutions and the participation of civil society organizations, academics and the general public.

Gender equality is yet to be realized and creating gender sensitivity among policy makers is vital to harness their support for integrating proposed strategies into the country's national policy framework and the national budget. Introducing a system to collect gender disaggregated data related to the subject areas is important to ensure effective implementation and monitoring at the national and subnational levels. A strong coordination between the vertical and horizontal levels is required to avoid duplication and to develop a collective approach to ensure successful implementation and to achieve desired results.

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A Silhouette for South Asian Policy on SDG 5: Convergences and Way Forward

B. Rajeshwari

The country reports in this volume combined articulate the South Asia vision on SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment. By intersecting SDG 5 with other locally relevant SDG/s, the country reports have contextualized regional realities with regard to gender equality. The policy brief locates the converging regional trends and presents a pathway for South Asia to realize SDG 5.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all the countries in South Asia in 2015 as signatories of the 2030 Agenda. The goals encapsulate the core dimensions of economic, social and environmental development. They are viewed as an ambitious commitment by world leaders to a universal agenda which each country matched with their national agenda and further localized the global goals with country-specific targets and indicators (SDG India Index, Baseline Report, 2018). In significant ways, the SDGs aim to achieve the unfinished agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and even move beyond the MDGs. They are a combination of human development needs integrated with crosscutting issues for advancing development across all sectors. Each South Asian country has put in place institutional arrangements to monitor and achieve the SDGs. Therefore, it is essential to contextualize them within this framework in South Asia.¹

Among the 17 SDGs, SDG 5 on gender equality is especially significant for South Asia. The region has lagged in economic and political

¹ In India, the responsibility of planning, implementation and evaluation of SDGs lies with the Niti Aayog. The Sri Lankan government established the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife for coordinating and facilitating SDG implementation. In Afghanistan, it is the Ministry of Economy that has been given the responsibility. In Bangladesh, the Prime Minister's Office does direct monitoring of the SDGs which are being implemented by the Planning Commission and SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee.

empowerment of women (SDGs South Asia Report, 2016). It is also a region of several paradoxes where there is, on the one hand, a growing acknowledgement of gender rights and equality, while on the other, there are increasing numbers in violence against women like rape, dowry deaths, trafficking, spousal violence and honour killings. South Asian countries continue to perform poorly on global comparative measures of gender equality, including the Global Gender Gap, Gender Development and the Gender Inequality Indices. Most South Asian nations find themselves at the bottom of global rankings based on these indices, except for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Along with the everyday challenges of accessing basic resources, women in South Asia face structural and institutional challenges in transforming their rights to absolute freedom.

The India Report on SDG5+ suggests that one in three married women in India experiences spousal violence. Women in Pakistan are at the bottom of the socio-economic categories, and the country is placed 151 in the Global Gender Gap Index out of 153 countries (Hashmi, VNR-Pakistan Draft Report). There are growing numbers of cases of honour killing in the country, of which women are the primary victims. Incidents of violence committed within the four walls of a house or by a family member are underreported in most South Asian countries. Bangladesh has high levels of gender-based violence (GBVs), with more girls entering early and forced marriages. Across South Asia, there is a marked increase in a parallel set of inequalities experienced by women at multiple levels leading to overt and covert forms of violence, whether domestic violence, gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict, female feticide, cyberbullying practices and workspace harassment. The broader canvas of structural and personal experiences of violence impinging on the multiple levels of inequalities women face needs foregrounding in South Asia to develop common grounds to address this challenge. In doing so, the policy brief recommends developing a more culturally nuanced and contextually driven approach to tackle gender inequalities. At the same time, it also suggests a shared vocabulary within South Asia while fulfilling the mandate of SDGs.

Policy Recommendations for South Asia

Situate SDG 5 as a Crosscutting Goal

The SDGs provide an opportunity for South Asian countries to align their national development priorities with the global development agenda. The implementation of the SDGs was envisioned through establishing interrelations and interactions between several SDGs. The focus was to

foster a virtuous cycle of positive dimensions of one goal leading to further progress in others.

Correlating SDG 5 with other SDGs in South Asia

There are strong intersectionalities between SDG 5 and other SDGs. For instance, the Afghanistan report explores the interconnectedness between SDG 5 and SDG16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. It highlights the critical role of the rule of law in channelizing gender empowerment and addressing gender inequalities. The Sri Lankan report demonstrates the connection between SDG 1 on No Poverty and SDG 5 to address the structural barriers in achieving gender equality in the country. The Nepal report analyses SDG5 alongside SDG 16, focusing on better representation for women in government institutions. The India report explores the crosscutting connections between SDG 5 and SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 4 (education), SDG 10 (political representation) and SDG 16 (peace and security) and argues for increasing gender-specific indicators in other related SDGs.

Providing support mechanisms for crosscutting agenda

SDG 5's interconnectedness with other SDGs should be innovatively channelized for furthering the gender agenda. The India SDG Index Report (2018) brings out the close correlation between SDG 5 and other go. Still, it falls short of putting in place mechanisms that facilitate achieving these goals in an integrated and coherent manner. Gender targets continue to be pursued in silos. Secondly, to bring greater coherence within the gender-specific targets across all SDGs, there is a need to develop integrated cross-cutting targets. For instance, targets for SDG 4 on quality education and its intersection with SDG 5 can be better established by creating indicators that go beyond enrolment indexes. The enrolment of more girls in primary education does not suggest better learning patterns for them or spill over of the same in improving other indicators of SDG 5. Specific indicators of SDGs need to be correlated with SDG 5. For example, the indicator of Waste Disposal in SDG 11 should be linked with SDG 5 to create innovative patterns for achieving better results for both goals.

Scale up SDG 5 to a Regional Goal

Forging partnerships for SDG 5 plus

Alongside a coherent, substantive and inclusive approach to interconnect the SDGs, what is further needed is an integration of SDG 5 with SDG 17

(Partnerships for the Goals) for all South Asian countries. Target 17.14 calls for governments to “enhance policy coherence for sustainable development” as a means to achieve the SDGs. The target flags the interconnectedness between the 17 SDGs and the benefits of synchronized action between the various stakeholders and the levels of government. A solid foundational basis for SDG 5 can aid in forging partnerships across borders and boundaries, with women taking a primary role. A South Asian initiative with support from civil society organizations working on peacebuilding and justice can be a way forward for scaling up the crosscutting agenda to the regional level. Partnerships can be around data collection, monitoring, capacity development, sharing success stories and processes involved in achieving the targets linked to SDG 5.

An Agenda for Peace, Justice and Strong institutions

Scaling up of SDG 5 necessitates a similar scaling up of SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions at the regional level. Consultations with CSOs for ground-level engagement around SDG 5 and SDG16 together could have useful learnings, and parallels can be drawn from varied experiences among the countries.² This will help build state capacities at multiple levels and address issues linked to implementation in most South Asian countries. Sharing of knowledge, experiences and information at the regional level and a non-silo approach to partnerships with CSOs can be a way to scale up SDG 5 and SDG 16 to the regional level.

Strengthen Economic Participation

Many country reports point to the economic gender gap and the declining rate of women’s participation in the labour market. Women’s access to economic resources and financial assets remains poor. In countries like Sri Lanka, unemployment among women is twice as much as men despite attaining higher education and skills. Without a doubt, increasing women’s labour force participation rate and improving their access to economic resources and financial assets will advance the status of women and reduce the economic gender gap. There are multiple schemes introduced by South Asian countries in this regard. In India, the *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana* is an example of such initiatives.

² The women, peace and security agenda is a case in point providing a platform for creating regional cooperation.

Beyond participation of women in the formal labour force

Equally important will be to recognize women's unpaid work and care, given the patriarchal context. In South Asia, a considerable percentage of women are engaged in unpaid work and care. The pandemic has further accentuated the burden of unpaid work that women endure in most South Asian countries. Further, as the Bangladesh country report highlights, a considerable percentage of women engaged in the informal sector, which was severely affected during the pandemic leading to livelihood insecurity. Therefore, active government policy intervention must bridge the gap between the formal and informal sectors, strengthening and increasing women's economic participation.

Develop a Context-driven, Culturally-nuanced Process for SDG 5

How women define empowerment is contextual and differs by the socio-cultural environment they are in. A study of Bangladeshi women found women desired more equality within their families instead of greater independence outside of the family (Kabeer 2011). In South Asia, the cultural norms and mores within which women negotiate their position prove detrimental to achieving SDG 5. In many contexts, autonomy and agency, which are key indicators of empowerment (something that none of the countries map), are defined in a relative and relational sense by women (Rajeshwari et al., 2020).³

Many of the gender-related goals and indicators currently localized by the South Asian countries to illustrate achievements, or a lack thereof, in SDG 5 are inadequate in themselves and are not truly indicative of gender equality and women empowerment (Kim, 2017; Strachan et al., 2015). For instance, mere equal access to economic resources and the right to ownership without attendant decision-making power over their usage cannot ensure gender equality.

Cultural diversities within South Asia compel the need for a context-driven approach to gender equality in the region. Global measures for gender equality and empowerment need cautious usage as they can obscure

³ An example to illustrate is the freedom to visit the market alone can be viewed differently when located through the prism of class and caste. For many women who come from "privileged" societies, visiting the market can be demeaning while for others it can be associated with real autonomy. Similarly, access to the natural resources becomes a source of both freedom in some cases while a burden in others.

contextual dimensions of women's lives in which they are empowered or disempowered.

Space for plural approaches

Given that HDI varies vastly even with each country, it is essential to choose the intersecting Goal with SDG 5 based on local realities and needs. For instance, some areas would require stronger linkages with SDG 4 (Quality education), while others would require correlation with SDG 3 (Health and well-being) depending on the community's priorities. Thus, a comprehensive and yet plural approach is needed while forging linkages between SDG 5 and other goals in South Asia.

SDG5 Goals through a Decentralized Prism

The Indian government has introduced several schemes (Yojanas) for women and the girl child like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana*. Afghanistan has enacted legislation like the Anti-Harassment Regulation (2016) as a legal safeguard to the exercise of women's rights. Pakistan has adopted the Criminal Law (Amendment) in the forced marriages of children and minorities Act 2016 and several programs like *Ehsaas*, an income support program for women. These legislations and programs are already in place and are being aligned with respective national SDG plans. Yet critical gaps exist, stalling fundamental transformation. A way forward, therefore, could be in a decentralized approach involving diverse stakeholders.

Vertical and horizontal integration of various stakeholders

Agenda 2030 and "Leaving no one Behind" will become a reality only when there is actual inclusion, made possible through vertical and horizontal integration of various sectors in South Asia. Substantial achievement is possible through short term goal-setting with specific achievable targets and by engaging the local actors in the process.

Some of the countries in South Asia have already acknowledged and expressed this need for decentralizing the SDG framework implementation. The Niti Aayog's India VNR report 2020, for instance, is titled "Taking SDGs from Global to Local." There is a strong recognition of the need for local-level initiatives with a localized solution orientation for achieving Agenda 2030. Yet, these remain primarily top-down models of monitoring, capacitating and sensitizing the local leadership about the gender agenda.

Local women-led initiatives

The role of women leaders at the local level is particularly significant as it correlates with one of the critical indicators of better political representation for women where they can claim agency – the ability to make choices and act upon these choices as a central component of empowerment (Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Kabeer 1999).

In South Asia, community building organizations (CBOs) can play an essential role at the local level in ensuring several SDGs are incorporated into people's everyday vocabulary. The Panchayat leadership programs for women representatives led by local CBOs in India is a case in point. Similarly, in Pakistan, several women's rights groups relentlessly work out innovative solutions for gender equality within their operational domain. It is vital to find parallel stories of success across South Asia where women-led organizations carve their solutions and how they can be integrated into national and regional campaigns.

The way forward for South Asia in achieving SDG 5 can be in adopting more qualitative indicators for gender equality and women's empowerment. This will mean studying the quality of learning access available to both boys and girls along with student enrolment at all levels of school and higher education. Implementation of SDG 5 plans in South Asia can have substantial value when policies target everyday violence against women by breaking the cycle of normalization of such violence. Defining violence in multiple and contextual ways can be a good starting point. Beyond national legislation, South Asian countries need to address the critical gap between the procedural and the substantial. There is a need for stronger institutional operationalizing of goals at the local and regional levels. The participation of civil society and community-based organizations at the local level have proved to be significantly helpful in the case of other regions and also within South Asia. Partnerships between government and civil society organizations can pave the way for shared learning within the region. A decentralized approach with more inclusive and participatory schemes can be the key, as indicated in the recommendations of the country reports in this volume. Overall, for SDG 5 to be meaningfully achieved in South Asia, there is a need for a contextually derived approach and complex analysis (quantitative and qualitative), which have women's dignity as the fulcrum.

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Profiles of Researchers

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Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS) is a South Asian think tank. Established in 1992 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, RCSS conducts collaborative research, networking and interaction on strategic and international issues pertaining to South Asia. It is the regional secretariat of GPPAC South Asia. GPPAC (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict) is a global network of civil society organizations.



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