A Study On Recent Developments And Policy Initiatives For Women Welfare In India To Achieve Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Recent advances in women's welfare in India have significantly contributed to the nation's sustainable development efforts. Various government policies, legal reforms, and socio-economic initiatives have enhanced women's empowerment by improving access to education, healthcare, financial inclusion, and leadership opportunities. Despite these developments, challenges such as gender disparities, socio-cultural barriers, and climate vulnerabilities persist. This research paper explores the latest advancements in women's welfare in India, assessing their impact on sustainable development and proposing strategies for further progress. Addressing these challenges through policy enhancements and targeted interventions will be crucial in ensuring that women remain integral to India's journey toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering an inclusive, equitable society.

Index Terms -Sustainable Development, Women Welfare, Gender Equality, Inclusive Growth

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a broad and important concept that attempts to harmonise the requirements of mankind with environmental protection. The goal of sustainable development (SD) is to create a world in which economic growth, social well-being, and environmental health may coexist in a sustainable manner(**Hariram et al., 2023**). The Brundtland Report, (**Brundtland & Khalid, 1987**)which was published in 1987 and was formally titled Our Common Future, was a significant turning point in the process of defining sustainable development as the ability to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own specific needs." The policymaking process has been influenced by this report, which has encouraged a shift towards integrated approaches that take into consideration financial, social, and environmental factors simultaneously.

As a worldwide action plan to achieve sustainable development by the year 2030, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** were approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September of 2015.

In recognition of the fact that sustainability is multi-faceted, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) **(Bąk, 2024)**address difficulties across three primary pillars:

> ➢ **Economic Sustainability**

- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)

- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)

> ➢ **Social Sustainability**
- SDG 1 (No Poverty)
- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)
- SDG 4 (Quality Education)
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)
- SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)

> ➢ **Environmental Sustainability**

- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)
- SDG 13 (Climate Action)
- SDG 14 (Life Below Water)
- SDG 15 (Life on Land)

This ensures that development efforts are socially inclusive, economically viable, and environmentally responsible

Gender Equality and Women's Welfare as Key Components of SDGs

Due to the fact that they have an impact on economic growth, social stability, and environmental sustainability, gender equality and the welfare of women are essential components in the process of achieving sustainable development. Not only is it a moral imperative, but it is also an economic and social need to ensure that women are empowered and have equal involvement in all parts of life. This is because women make up half of the world's population. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5 (Gender Equality), bring to light the significant contribution that women's rights, empowerment, and welfare play in the process of attaining a world that is both just and sustainable**(Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).**

Gender Equality in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

It is the specific objective of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) to eliminate gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequities in order to guarantee that women and girls have equal opportunity in the areas of education, work, leadership, and decision-making. Among the most important goals that fall under SDG 5 are:

- One of the goals of the Ending Discrimination initiative is to eradicate all types of discrimination based on gender in the social, economic, and political arenas.
- To eliminate violence against women and girls, it is imperative to put an end to all forms of violence, including but not limited to domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and destructive practices like child marriage.

- For the purpose of achieving a work-life balance for women, it is important to acknowledge and redistribute unpaid care work, which includes domestic and caregiving responsibilities. In order to guarantee equal leadership and decision-making, it is imperative to enhance the participation of women in leadership positions within the realms of politics, communities, and companies.

Interconnections Between Gender Equality and Other SDGs

Although gender equality is specifically addressed in SDG 5, it is deeply interconnected with other SDGs, influencing multiple dimensions of sustainable development.

Table. Interconnections Between Gender Equality and SDGs

SDG	Link to Gender Equality
SDG 1 (No Poverty)	Women are disproportionately affected by poverty due to limited access to education, employment, and financial resources. Empowering women contributes to poverty reduction.
SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)	Women play a key role in food security and agriculture. Gender-sensitive agricultural policies improve productivity and reduce malnutrition.
SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-being)	Maternal health, reproductive rights, and access to healthcare improve when gender equality is prioritized.
SDG 4 (Quality Education)	Educating girls leads to better economic opportunities, reduced child mortality, and overall social progress.
SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	Gender parity in the workforce enhances productivity, economic growth, and financial independence for women.
SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	Gender discrimination is a form of social inequality. Addressing gender disparities promotes social justice and inclusive development.
SDG 13 (Climate Action)	Women are often more vulnerable to climate change impacts but play a crucial role in environmental conservation and sustainable resource management.

The interrelationships between these goals illustrate that achieving gender equality is a catalyst for sustainable development since it speeds up progress towards numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Challenges in Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Welfare
Despite global commitments, significant barriers remain in achieving gender equality. Some of the key challenges include:

1. Economic Inequality and Workforce Participation:
- Women earn less than men for the same work and are underrepresented in leadership roles.
- The gender pays gap remains a global issue, with women earning 20% less than men on average.
- Women are more likely to be engaged in informal, unpaid, or low-paying jobs, limiting financial independence.

2. Limited Access to Education:
- Girls in many developing countries still face barriers to education, including poverty, cultural norms, and early marriage.
- 130 million girls worldwide remain out of school, limiting their future opportunities.

3. **Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:**

- 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

- Human trafficking, honor killings, and domestic violence remain serious human rights violations affecting women's safety.

4. **Health and Reproductive Rights:**

- Many women, especially in rural areas, lack access to maternal healthcare, contraception, and reproductive health services.

- High rates of maternal mortality are linked to insufficient healthcare access and early pregnancies.

5. **Political and Social Exclusion:**

- Women hold only 26% of parliamentary seats globally, despite being 50% of the population.

- Patriarchal norms and societal attitudes limit women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

These difficulties underline the immediate necessity of policy changes, awareness campaigns, and worldwide effort to guarantee women's welfare and gender equality.

II. A Survey on Recent Developments and Policy Initiatives for Women Welfare in India to Achieve Sustainable Development

Recent researches have placed greater emphasis on the interrelationship that exists between gender equality and sustainable development, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Gupta, V. (2024) highlighted the ways in which government programs, such as Stand-Up India and PM Mudra Yojana, have improved women's access to credit, but they continue to face challenges from both institutions and society.

Kumar, R., & Garg, 2023 after their investigation on the role that women's economic empowerment plays in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), came to the conclusion that financial independence leads to greater social inclusion and environmental consciousness.

Roy et al., 2022 investigated of the compatibility of India's gender policies with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They discovered that although initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have succeeded in raising awareness about the importance of female education, there are still major implementation gaps.

Furthermore, **Pillai, 2022** emphasised the significance that public-private partnerships have in speeding gender equity and stated that cooperation between the government, corporate sector, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) might assist increase the success of women-centric programs.

The findings of a cross-country study that was carried out by **Raman et al., 2022** revealed that countries that scored higher on gender equality tend to perform better in terms of overall sustainable development indicators.

Overview of Government Schemes for Women Welfare

The benefits and difficulties of women-centric plans to promote gender-inclusive growth have recently come to light in the literature(**CHOUDHURY & Singh, n.d.**). In their analysis of the effect of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) on India's female literacy rates, found that although the program was effective in increasing awareness, its execution varied greatly between the states.

Similarly, **(Sekher et al., n.d.)** looked at how the Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) works to improve access to healthcare for mothers, and they found that bureaucratic red tape and delays in disbursing funds have made it ineffective.

Khan, A. 2023 highlighted that programs like Stand-Up India and Mudra Yojana have increased women's access to loans, but many female entrepreneurs still face challenges due to a lack of education and experience in the field.

Cremin et al., 2023 found that social stigma and regulatory delays prevent women entrepreneurs from fully utilising cash incentives offered by several state-level schemes.

Free LPG connections are provided to women from economically poorer groups through the Ujjwala Yojana, which was investigated by **(Ray, 2021)**. According to their findings, the program has improved women's health and reduced indoor air pollution, although refill affordability is a long-term sustainability concern.

In their study, **(Hegde, 2021)** looked at the Mahila Shakti Kendra program, which aims to empower women in rural areas. They found that the program had a good effect on the development of self-help groups (SHGs), but that there wasn't enough of a push to get the word out.

Kasare,2020 found that a major obstacle to the development of Mahila E-Haat, an online marketplace for women entrepreneurs, is the low level of digital literacy among rural women.

Vitale Brovarone & Cotella, 2020 concluded that victims of domestic violence have better access to legal and psychological assistance because of the One Stop Centre Scheme, but there is still lack of knowledge and problems with accessibility, particularly in rural regions.

Nayak et al., 2020 studied how the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) helped women get the healthcare they needed, one positive change was the increase in healthcare outreach thanks to the addition of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers, although inconsistent funding is still a major issue. While the Women Helpline 181 program has helped victims of domestic abuse right away, **(Veparala, 2019)** found that there is a lack of support for victims' rehabilitation and reintegration into society in the long run.

Several studies examined the effects of policies that prioritise women on sustainable development from 2020 to 2017. Financial assistance schemes for girls increase educational retention but necessitate tighter monitoring systems, according to **(Karondo, 2018)** evaluation of Uttar Pradesh's Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana. Gender inequalities in skill selection and training possibilities have prevented women from fully benefiting from government-backed skill development programs, according to **(Bansal et al., 2016)**investigation into the topic.

Carvalho et al., 2014 conducted an evaluation of the Janani Suraksha Yojana's effects on mother and child health. They found that although the program has increased the number of births that take place in hospitals, one problem that still needs fixing is the lack of proper postnatal care.

Prior research established the framework for comprehending the historical development of women's welfare policy in India. While policies enacted after 2015 are in better alignment with the SDGs, structural reforms are still necessary, according to **(Gebeye, 2016)** who investigated the shift from traditional welfare programs to rights-based schemes. Although India has enacted progressive gender budgeting regulations, their execution at the state level is variable, according to **(Stotsky, 2016)**, who evaluated the impact of gender budgeting in welfare initiatives.

Impact of Women Welfare Schemes on Sustainable Development

In developing countries like India, recent research has highlighted the importance of women's welfare programs in promoting sustainable development. In their study, **(P. Kumari, n.d.)** looked at how Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) helped increase female literacy and decrease the gender gap in school enrolment. They found that while the program worked well in cities, it encountered problems in rural areas because of cultural and social obstacles. In a similar vein, **(Jagannath & Chakravarthy, 2025)** examined the effects of the Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) on mother and child health and concluded that, although

the program has enhanced institutional deliveries, its full potential is hindered by delayed cash release and a lack of knowledge among recipients.

Mudra Yojana and Stand-Up India are two examples of financial inclusion plans that **(Satsangi et al., 2025)**highlighted as having encouraged more women to start their own businesses, but that both programmes might benefit from improved financial literacy training if they are to succeed in the long run.

Access to clean cooking fuel has improved health outcomes and increased women's participation in income-generating activities, thus contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), according to another study that examined the economic impact of Ujjwala Yojana **(Asharaf & Tol, 2024)**.

In addition**, (Malhotraa, n.d.)** assessed the effectiveness of One Stop Centre (Sakhi) and Women Helpline 181. They found that although these programs have improved institutional assistance for victims of gender-based violence, barriers such as social stigma and low reporting rates still persist. Based on their research, **(Hufad et al., 2019)** concluded that women in rural areas are less likely to be able to take advantage of government programs due to low levels of digital literacy and internet access.

Research Gap

In spite of the substantial body of research that has been conducted on women's welfare programs and gender equality, there are still a number of gaps in our understanding of the actual impact that these programs have on sustainable development, particularly in the context of Uttar Pradesh being a regional state. There have been steps taken by the government to promote education, healthcare, financial inclusion, and social security for women; however, the success of these programs has not been evaluated to a considerable extent in terms of how much they contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, the majority of the studies that are now available are based on policy evaluations and secondary data, and they do not include any empirical evidence from beneficiaries that might give a ground-level evaluation of these programs. This section highlights the important research gaps that require more examination, focussing on three primary areas: the absence of empirical effect assessments, the need for region-specific policy suggestions, and the absence of a relationship between government schemes and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conclusion

The welfare and empowerment of women are indispensable for achieving the broader goals of sustainable development in India. This study underscores that while numerous policy initiatives and legislative measures have been introduced — from financial inclusion programs to education and health schemes — the true measure of success lies in their effective implementation and long-term impact on women's lives.

The path to a sustainable future for India is inextricably linked to the empowerment of its women. Focused, action-driven strategies must continue to transform aspirations into realities, ensuring that women are active participants and leaders in shaping the nation's sustainable development journey.

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