



## **Gender Equality as a Sustainable Development Goal: Analytical Study of Gender issues in Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research paper aims to analyze issue of gender equality since Sustainable Development Goals 2030 initiative. The SDGs 2030 agenda is a comprehensive framework which aims to ensure sustainable development in UN member nations. SDGs are an extensive agenda that is covering social and economic development and protection of environment. The United Nation, under SDGs 2030, has prioritized empowerment of women and girls and has set the goals to ensure gender parity across the globe. Pakistan ranks among those nations in the world where gender gap is found in every sphere of life. This study adopts the method of case study and epistemology for analyzing the gaps of adopting and implementing the steps taken by government for establishing gender equality and women empowerment. Stated by latest Global Gender Gap report 2021, Pakistan's position has become worsens and slipped two spots on the index. Although the Pakistani Government took firm steps towards resolving gender equality and women's empowerment, but despite of firm commitment gender gap 'in the country has widened by 0.7% points. This research paper highlights present situation of gender gap in the country*



*and initiatives it has taken for ensuring gender equality and progress it has made since the universal call of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agenda. The researcher has used secondary sources to collect data for this research paper.*

**Keywords:** *Women empowerment, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, Pakistan, Gender Equality.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In year 2015, all member nations of the UN adopted Sustainable Development Goals. It is also known as 'Global Goals' because of its scope and importance. It is a universal call which aims to eradicate poverty, provide protection to the planet and ensure an environment where people live an equal, peaceful and prosperous life by year 2030. This is an international development framework which consists of seventeen goals aiming at social and economic development and environmental sustainability. Gender parity and empowering women and girls has central place in SDGs framework 2030. It is one of the seventeen SDGs which aim to empower women and ensure gender equality across the world. Furthermore, goal five aims to ensure that women and girls have equal rights and opportunities and there is no discrimination and violence against them (Chasek, Wagner & Leone, 2016).

Empowering women and eliminating any form of discrimination against them is a global issue (Fennell, 2012). At global level, women are given less opportunities in comparison to men. Women are less empowered in economic and political sphere, low access to education and health services (UNDP 2021). The agenda 2030 aim to empower women and girl, improving its access to health services, education, financial resources and political participation. The goal five of SDGs aims to empower women and girls in every sphere of life and end any form of discrimination against them.

Pakistan is one of those countries in the world where gender gap prevails in every sphere of life (Memon, Lohana & Naqvi, 2021). Realizing the significance of gender equality under international development framework, Pakistan has adopted the agenda 2030 and making measures for its effective implementation. Pakistan has made considerable progress and made this framework part of national strategies (Government of Pakistan, 2019). Pursuing the objectives of Sustainable Development goal 5, Pakistan has established commissions on status of women at provincial and national level. Women are now playing important role in policy making on gender gap and participation.



Empowering women is now foundation stone of key national planning which indicate Pakistan's firm commitment to enhance women's political participation Bushra & Wajiha (2015), economic empowerment and other spheres of life in the country (Durrani & Hallai, 2018). Addressing at the world leader's meeting in September 2015, the prime minister of Pakistan Muhammad Nawaz Sharif said: "All countries stand to benefit from empowerment of women. We are therefore determined to ensure a more central role for women in the political, economic and other spheres of our national life" (UN Women, 2021b).

This study aims to analyze issue of gender equality in Pakistan, since the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 has been projected. The SDGs main agenda is casing social and economic development and protection of environment. In Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), 2020, Pakistan ranks 151 number out of 153 countries in terms of gender equality (Ahmed, 2021, March 31). This study adopts the method of case study and epistemology for analyzing the gaps of adopting and implementing the steps taken by government for establishing gender equality and women empowerment. However, gender equality and empowerment of women still remains a problem to overcome in developing country like Pakistan. This study highlights the current situation of gender gap in the country and initiatives it has taken for ensuring gender equality.

This research paper explores Goal # 5 of Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Qualitative secondary analysis methodology has been used which used qualitative data. The researchers adopted secondary sources of data collection to conduct this research paper. Data collected through secondary sources was enough to conduct this paper, hence primary sources has not been used. These secondary sources include books, research articles, newspapers, websites, reports published by international organizations etc.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2030 AGENDA**

SDS 2030 agenda is an extensive framework of international development. All goals of this framework are unified and are expected to bring positive outcomes for women and girls across the world if implemented successfully (Meraj & Sadaqat, 2016). This framework of international development includes a specific agenda for empowerment of women and girls and gender equality in every part of the world. Goal 5 is a specific goal which aims to eliminate discrimination and violence against women and ensure gender equality. Since the adoption of SDGs, the world countries are making efforts to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure gender equality (Razavi, 2016).



However, gender equality and empowerment of women still remains a problem to overcome. Female access to education has witnessed a gradual increase, the ratio of early marriage has lessened and progress has been made enhance women's access to health care services (Sohail, 2014). Despite these positive changes, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls remain a global issue and discrimination against women is a blocking factor to sustainable development in many countries of the world (UNODC, 2021). Ending all forms of gender discrimination against women is crucial for sustainable development.

Following are key points of goal 5-gender equality.

- Eliminate all form of discrimination and violence against women and girls and end women's trafficking and other forms of exploitation.
- End early and forced marriage.
- Recognize and make valuable women work.
- Ensure women participation at all levels of decision making and give equal leadership opportunities.
- Enhance women access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
- Ensure equal opportunities of women economic resources and their rights in asset possession, financial services etc. as per domestic laws of each member states.
- Take steps and make effective strategies and legislations in order to ensure gender parity and empowerment of women and girls.
- Increase the role of enabling technology to in process of women and girls empowerment.
- United Nation Women.

## **GENDER EQUALITY IN PAKISTAN**

Realizing the importance of ensuring gender equality under international development framework, Pakistan is taking steps to achieve goals under SDGs to promote gender quality and empower women and girls. Following adoption of SDGs, Pakistan has introduced new strategies to tackle the problems of gender inequalities against women and empower them in every sphere of social life. Since 2016, Pakistan has been making measures to achieve targets set under SDGs-5.

Women are almost half of Pakistan's population. In Pakistan, women face many socio-economic issues. Female literacy ratio is lower than that of male (Khurshid, 2017). Even though a projected 60 million women and girls are of working age, but their contribution is 20% in paid labor (United Nation Women, 2021a). The contribution of



women in the labor market is effected by socio-economic obstacles such as structural gendered work place barriers and family priorities (Khalid & Aroosh, 2014). Women in Pakistan are still subject to these inequalities even though governmental actions against inequalities.

Pakistan's position is still in the list of those countries where gender gap is found with worst figures. In 2020, Pakistan was listed at 151<sup>th</sup> position out of 153 nations on the list of 'Global Gender Gap Index'. Furthermore, Pakistan was only successful in surpassing Iran and Yemen. According to the report, it stands 150<sup>th</sup> in terms of economic participation, 143<sup>rd</sup> in area of education, 149<sup>th</sup> in terms of health and 93<sup>rd</sup> in sphere of political participation (UNODC, 2021).

Additionally, Pakistan is one of those countries in the world where gender inequality is widespread, found in every sphere of life (Khan & Noreen, 2012). Women and girls lags far behind men in field of politics, economics, finance, education, and health care facilities in Pakistan (Memon, Lohana & Naqvi, 2021). Right to life is fundamental and the basic fundamental human rights. In Pakistan, a high number of mothers continue this fundamental human right as maternal mortality rates reached to alarming level in 2014 and 2015.

In Pakistan, there are large numbers of children which have no access to school and extreme gender inequalities in education (Ahmed, 2021). In 2014-15, about 81% of women in Balochistan were not able to complete primary level of education. Approximately, 57% of women had never attended school. In Pashtunkhuwa, the literacy rate during this period was higher than other provinces but inequalities against women remain worsen. Sindh and Punjab provinces during the same period witnessed improvements in area of literacy rate, but gender gap remained unchanged (Ijaz, 2020, October 28).

Moreover, rank of Pakistan in terms of 'Mother Mortality Ration' in 2015 declined to 149 from 147 just improved than Afghanistan. Women are also suffering other problems like food insecurity, inadequate nutrition, low financial allocations which deeply affect their lives. Additionally, the negative social impacts of denying women rights are not being considered in the country (Haque & Yamoah, 2014). Poverty, lack of access to health care facilities, lack of access to education, and finance are issues faced by women in Pakistan. Women in Pakistan are empowered to fully participate in the realm of socio-economic development of the country (Bhattacharya, 2014). The female literacy ratio still remains an intractable challenge; particularly widespread illiteracy in



rural areas further impacts the low status of female-resulting in even more exploitation and violence.

Gender inequality is prevalent in Pakistan, affecting women in every sphere of life. Patriarchy is considered a fundamental for gender inequality which affects women in all fields in society (Baig. et al, 2018). The discrimination against women creates barriers in their life and they remain unable to progress and play effective role in development of country (Hadi, 2017). In addition, social life of women and girls in rural areas of Pakistan are more vulnerable to exploitation. They live under extreme dominance of men. Women play crucial role in Pakistani society. Its contribution in agriculture and livestock sector is valuable (Memon, 2021). Besides, women involve all household's works. Unfortunately, despite contributing in every sphere of life she remains deprive of her fundamental rights.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5 AND PAKISTAN**

In Pakistan, women are subject to inequalities in every sphere of social life. It contribution in labor market is limited. The contribution of women in decision-making, finance, property, asset ownership, and education is substandard (Batool, 2018). Since Pakistan's has population with almost half comprising women, Pakistan gives importance to empowering women and girl and encourages them to contribute in the national development of the country. Pakistan is making efforts to achieve the projected goals under SDGs 2030. Ensuring gender equality, which is central to SDGs, also has great importance for the policy makers of Pakistan (The News Correspondent, 2019, March 12). Notwithstanding huge challenges, Pakistan has indeed made significant progress towards gender equality in recent years. More women and girls are given opportunities in field of education, health, finance and politics (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

To end such inequalities is necessary for human development. Founder of Pakistan captured this seventy year ago: "No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women."

In year 2016, during UN 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for the Status of Women Pakistan's Ambassador to UN Maleeha Lodhi stated Pakistan was keen to achieve objectives under Sustainable Development Goals 5. "Physical violence has been described as the most shameful of all human rights violations and one of the most



intractable to eliminate, she asserted, conceding that we have come a long way, but challenges still exist” (Dawn, 2016, March 20).

The contribution of women labor force is witnessing a gradual change in Pakistan. The number of girls is also witnessing gradual increase in higher education and women are now entering professional categories (Tahir, 2019, April 3).. Currently, gender gap is widespread in area of education. While as the number of working women in managerial positions has witnessed positive change from 0, 3% in year 2012-13, to 0.5% in year 2018 (Ijaz, 2018). In health sector, women’s contribution is around 70% in the health workforce. Pakistan has made outstanding progress through legislations and effective work force polices (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Government is taking steps to achieve targets under goals-5 of SDGs. Serious efforts are being made enhance representation of women in forums, boards, and organizations. Pursuing goals of ending gender gap and eliminating discrimination against women and girls, the country is witnessing remarkable changes. Pakistan’s commitments and pragmatic implementation is evident form a wide range of national and provincial legislation in recent years in order to address gender inequalities and achieve targets set under Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Furthermore, provincial governments with collaboration of federal government have adopted effective strategies and taking steps to achieve goal of women empowerment and ending gender gap (PCSW, 2019). These policies are expected to lead to social change and make Pakistan a country with lowest gender gap. The initiatives made by government are receiving positive feedback. The initiative to form women-only police stations in some areas and the launch of training and rehabilitation centers are remarkable acts. The commissions working on provincial and national level are playing significant role to empower women and eradicate inequalities against it. Moreover, government has amended maternity benefit act and domestic violence protection and prevention act and protection against harassment of women at the work place have been passed (Dawn, 2016, March 20).

Early marriage is negatively affecting life of girls. It is a barrier in way to their empowerment (Duflo, 2012). Ensuring gender equality and empowering women needs to end the practice of early marriage. Pakistan has realized that abolishing this practice will enhance opportunities for women. Following implementation of SDGs, government of Pakistan has made measures to end inequalities against women and girls. Child marriage act in Pakistan has fixed minimum age for marriage. Moreover, in order to enhance opportunities for women employment, quota system has been introduced in the public



sector. It has been made mandatory that the representation of women in statutory bodies and public sector organization should be 33% (Ijaz, 2018).

Government has taken many steps to enhance women empowerment and eradicate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Government has taken initiatives to protect the rights of women and has allocated funds to achieve projected goals through various initiatives. Government has established the federal ombudsperson to protect women against violence and harassment at workplace which is functional at provincial level as well (A.P.P., 2019, June 14). Furthermore, government of Pakistan under Pakistan Baitul-Mal has established women empowerment centers which aim to train widows, orphans and poor women and girls in various skills. These centers also provide domestic skills and disable individuals are provided assistance (Mujahid, Noman & Begum, 2015).

In Punjab, the government has initiated a gender management information system, while a day care centers at work places have been set up in Sindh province. In order to end gender inequalities in policy design, government has organized training and ensured resource allocation for public sector officials (Government of Punjab, 2016).

## **PRIORITIES AND TARGETS**

Main priorities of Pakistan related to Sustainable Development Goal- 5:

- To maintain effective monitoring of progress on implementation of gender-response strategy framework.
- To effectively monitor progress on the implementation of gender-response policy agendas.
- To create structures in order to enhance women empowerment in the labor market.
- To form system and structures which will scientifically develop, implement, monitor behavioral change communication to further gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.
- To support women's entrepreneurs and strengthen mechanism to end violence against women (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

## **12<sup>TH</sup> FIVE YEAR PLAN 2018-2023 AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

In 2018, Pakistan formulated its 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan which also included initiatives for women empowerment; enhancing their contribution of female labor from current 14.50% to 24.50%. The plan consists of numerous initiatives to ensure empowerment of



women in the country. In order to achieve these goals, government has allocated adequate funds for women development projects, prioritizing women and girl's education, and providing them loans. The government has made legislative measures in order to provide women and girls equal opportunities and ensure their protection at work place. Additionally, government has also initiated the "one woman, one bank account plan" whereby 5.7 million will be enabled to open their saving accounts (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Pakistan has given due importance to achieve SDGs. IT has taken planned many initiatives under 12th five year plan. The plan will focus ending all forms of gender discrimination and ensuring empowerment of women in Pakistan. Government has planned to ensure an inclusive gender environment and eliminate gender gap in the country (A.P.P., 2019, June 14).

Additionally, policy of institutionalization of gender equality and empowerment of women has been approved which aims to create an encouraging atmosphere for women and girls in society and workplace. It is indeed step to ensure gender parity in the labor market, enhance enrollment of girls, and ensure provision of equal economic and financial opportunities for women in the country. Government of Pakistan has projected to introduce effective structure to provide support to women in labor market (Khan, 2020).

In order to enhance women's financial empowerment, skill development workshops has been planned. Government has planned to provide interest-free micro finance loans in order to support women to initiate their own businesses. Moreover, government has also planned to form structure to wipe out violence against women (ITU News, 2018). This will help in enhancing women access to financial resources and make them economically empowered. Having own business will empower women economically and sound financially which will also positively affect women life in other spheres of life (Ahmed, 2021).

## **WAY FORWARD**

Since it has adopted SDGs 2030 agenda, Pakistan is making measures to end all form of gender discrimination and empower women and girls. Despite firm commitment of government and measures it has made, overall situation of gender equality women's empowerment in the country is worse. According to Global Gender Gap report 2021, Pakistan's position has become worsen. It has slipped two spots on the index. The report reveals that 'gender gap 'in the country has widened by 0.7% points, making it one of

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those countries where gender equality is found with worst figures. (The News Correspondent., 2019, March 12). Pakistan has only managed to surpass Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan to make progress in ensuring gender equality in the country.

With this progress, it is unlikely to achieve goal 5 of agenda 2030. Pakistan should adopt effective strategies and prioritize gender equality in order to achieve goals under SDGs 2030. Women in rural areas of the country face more discrimination and domestic violence. Government should prioritize women empowerment in rural areas. If current situation of gender gap persist, Pakistan will not achieve SDGs. In order to achieve goals under 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan, Pakistan should make concrete measures. At present, Pakistan has not made considerable progress under agenda 2030 and its 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan. Government should take effective measures achieve projected goals and ensure empowerment of women and girls in the country. Pakistan should prioritize gender equality. Enhancing women's access to education, health facilities, financial and resources must become a priority for government. Without this, Pakistan will not be able to achieve planned objectives for empowering women and girls under agenda 2030.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research paper explored SDGs and gender equality. The agenda 2030 is a comprehensive framework of international development. All the goals of SDGs are interrelated and will have positive impacts on women's life. This study examined SDGs 5 and its implications for Pakistan as member state of United Nations. Presently, the world is facing the issue of Gender inequality and to ensure Gender Equality the UN under its SDGs 5 aims to overcome the issues and enhance women and girl's empowerment in every sphere of life. Presently, Gender inequality is prevalent in every sphere of live affecting the overall development of the country. Women in Pakistan still do not have access to fundamental rights. Pakistan is pursuing objectives to achieve goals of ensuring gender equality. However, women in the country still face difficulties in every sphere of life. Women are still subject to many social, economic, educational and health inequalities which deeply effects its role in Pakistani society. In Pakistan, women have always been perceived as second class citizens owing to socio-cultural, economic and legal barriers. Despite constituting half of the population of the country, they still have limited role. In fact, any efforts made for the uplift of society would be unproductive without women's representation and empowerment.

Pakistan has realized the importance of gender equality for overall progress of society. It has prioritized the empowerment of women and girls in every sphere of life. The federal government in collaboration with provincial governments is making

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measures to improve gender gap in the country. The measures government of Pakistan has taken following the adoption of SDGs 2030 agenda are commendable. Government has been playing crucial role to ensure gender equality in the country. However, gender gap still remains a serious problem to deal with. The latest report on gender gap has revealed that Pakistan's position has declined on index which is worrying for the policy makers. Nonetheless, focusing women's empowerment and ending discrimination against it, Pakistan's position is slipped furthermore. Pakistan need effective strategies and monitoring system to achieve goals of gender equality under SDGs 2030. Gaps in implementation have worsened the situation further. An effective system of monitoring should be established to improve the situation. Focusing on the issue of gender equality is not only a necessity but an emergency for Pakistan.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Following the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agenda, Pakistan is taking steps to eliminate inequalities and violence against women and girl's. Despite introducing new policies, ensuring gender equality still remains a problem. Following are some policy recommendations which will be helpful in achieving targets under SDGs.

- Women and girls living in rural parts of the country are more vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Their access to education, health care service, financial resources, and employment is extremely low. Addressing problems of women and girls in rural areas is urgent need of time.
- Government should introduce effective policies and launch initiatives to end domestic violence and all form of discrimination against women and girls in rural areas.
- Pakistan society is still dominated by social taboos and conservative mind-sets which affects women life. It keeps women out of decision making process and, deeply effecting its empowerment and social role. This status of women should be changed. The society needs more female representation that is economically empowered and politically active.
- At present, female literacy rate is not low. Government should take measures to improve female literacy ratio.



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