

# **Policy Frameworks and Governance Mechanisms for Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

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**Abstract:** Sustainable development also depends on gender equality and women's empowerment, which SDG 5 aims to achieve by eradicating discrimination and violence and ensuring that women are fully involved in every sector. In spite of all the global developments, gender inequality is still there mainly because of poor policy-making frameworks and poor governance systems. The paper will examine the policies and form of governance in existence, gaps in current policies, and give practical recommendations to accelerate gender equality. The study will use a mixed methods model, where it will conduct a qualitative analysis of policy documents, case studies, and SDG indicators, and then evaluate it quantitatively based on gender parity metrics. The paper discusses global initiatives such as the CEDAW and the SDG 2030 Agenda, regional policies, and national initiatives on gender inequality. Some of the key findings include the fact that some parts of the world, such as Europe and North America, possess strong governance structures, but Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are experiencing serious problems in policy implementation because of poor enforcement, financial shortfalls, and socio-cultural obstructions. The study highlights the need to have gender-responsive governance, gender equality policies incorporated in all sectors, and to enhance monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Some of the policy implications are the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms, better budgetary allocations, and have uniform law enforcement. The paper is a contribution to SDG policy research that ties the governance mechanisms to the gender equality outcomes and can provide real-life implications of global gender equality to enhance gender equality endeavors.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Governance Mechanisms; Policy Frameworks; SDG 5; Women's Empowerment; Gender-Responsive Governance.

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## **I. Introduction**

Women's empowerment and gender equality are paramount to the sustainable growth and social justice in the world. These goals are promoted as part of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which asserts the elimination of gender-based discrimination, violence, and unequal opportunities and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes in all spheres of life. SDG 5 is not a mere human right, but also a key to accelerating social, political, and economic development. Although the world has made tremendous strides, gender inequality still takes root in societal systems, and many aspects of empowerment among women are still hindered. Hence, proper policy guidelines and governance systems are required to transform promises into reality (Weber-Lewerenz & Vasiliu-Feltes, 2022; MacArthur et al., 2023).

SDG 5 highlights the importance of a holistic policy framework based on the elimination of gender inequality by making sure that women have equal representation in all aspects of life, such as in decision-making, education, and economic opportunities (Simon & Hasan, 2025; Kamila, 2025). Although there are different policies that have been adopted globally and even nationally to realize these goals, there are still considerable gaps in governance systems. These are the unequal application of gender equality laws, poor accountability mechanisms, culture, and a lack of sufficient funding towards gender-oriented projects. These loopholes hamper the successful implementation of policies, restrain the development of gender equality and empowerment of women in various regions (James, 2025; Ziwoni, 2025).

## **Objectives**

This paper is an attempt to evaluate and critically examine the current policy frameworks and mechanisms of governance in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The research objectives will be:

1. Explore the usefulness of international, country, and continental policies in supporting gender equality.
2. Determine the significant issues and facilitators of governance mechanisms that determine the effective implementation of gender equality policies.
3. Offer practical policy suggestions on how to amend governance structures in order to guarantee enhanced results in the empowerment of women.
4. This paper will help close the gap in the literature by connecting the effectiveness of policy frameworks and the practical challenges in governance structures that tend to impede the process of achieving gender equality.

The paper is structured into a number of sections. The Introduction presents the context by explaining the significance of gender equality and women's empowerment in connection with SDG 5, and the research objectives are presented. The Literature Review generalizes the literature on policy frameworks and mechanisms of governance, with global deficiencies being identified in the implementation. The Research Framework outlines the mixed-method design, which includes the sources of data and methods of analysis. In the Results section, there are findings on the efficacy of gender equality policies in the various regions presented in the form of tables and figures. These findings are interpreted through the Discussion that deals with the challenges and opportunities to improve the governance. Lastly, the Conclusion restates the main findings, provides practical suggestions, and presents the prospects of further research to increase the focus on gender equality.

## **II. Literature Review**

The literature review will seek to provide an overview of significant research and theories on the policy frameworks and governance processes in enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It will also point out research gaps that exist, particularly on the policy mechanisms, and give the basis of the current research.

International policy frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, and the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development, are key in determining gender equality endeavors across the world (Smith, 2025; Ko & Leung, 2025). These frameworks have come out of the narrowness in terms of legal rights to a broader view that incorporates economic, political, and social empowerment. An example is CEDAW, which is the international bill of rights to women and which promotes all-around legal frameworks in the nations (Deininger et al., 2023; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Likewise, the Beijing Platform points to the necessity of women's involvement in the decision-making process, and the SDG 2030 Agenda considers gender equality as one of the key cross-cutting objectives to promote the achievement of sustainable development (Irene et al., 2025; Lwamba et al., 2021). The key points of gender equality policy implementation are national institutions and legal frameworks. Some of the channels of governing have been adopted by other nations such as constitutional guarantees and gender quotas, national action plans and gender-oriented ministries. Nonetheless, inadequate enforcement, poor political will, and cultural barriers tend to compromise the effectiveness of these mechanisms. As an example, Khonjelwayo & Zondi, 2025 emphasize the national strategy of women's empowerment in South Africa but note that it has not been implemented in the local government (Mukendi & Manda, 2022). Also, the governance structures often do not have systems of accountability, thus creating unequal effects of policies.

There is empirical evidence about policy effectiveness that usually indicates inconsistent findings about gender equality initiatives. A systematic review of gender responsive governance in Myanmar by Chan et al., 2026 revealed that there is a presence of policy frameworks, but their execution is slow, and the governance structures do not seem to have the capacity to instigate actual change (Gondal & Hatta, 2024). Ikhsan et al., 2025 make a comparable statement and explore the mining industry by stating that the gender-inclusive policy frequently fails because, despite the exclusionary policy, there is no institutional commitment to it (Meagher et al., 2023). These studies highlight the importance of policies that transcend gender rhetoric and whose consequences are felt in the empowerment of women. Although there is a vast literature on gender policy frameworks, any research gap that exists currently is in the understanding of the best way through which it can be optimized into a reality that can measure results. A large part of the available literature, like in the work of Tazkianida, 2025, goes to general policy prescriptions but does not go further to examine the particular governance arrangements to support or inhibit such implementation (Ahmad et al., 2024).

The purpose of this paper is to fill these gaps by critically exploring the effectiveness of different mechanisms of governance and providing new directions on the ways to reformulate policy frameworks that would actually help to achieve gender equality. Gender equality is not just an independent goal, but it is also a cross-cutting theme of the broader SDG agenda. It overlaps with other targets like the eradication of poverty, good education, and decent employment. It is essential to include gender-responsive policies in all sectors in order to establish holistic and sustainable development. The review will also include the necessity to use an integrated approach to governance that would imply the consideration of gender equality at all levels of policy formulation and implementation, through the cooperation of multiple stakeholders on a local, national, and international level.

### **III. Research Framework**

The research design of this study is mixed-methods, involving qualitative and quantitative methods in order to have a complete comprehension of the policy frameworks, the governing policies, which embrace gender equality and the empowerment of women. The qualitative aspect will be an analysis of policy documents, institutional reports, and case studies to investigate the gender equality policy implementation in different national and regional settings. The quantitative aspect will be aimed at determining the efficacy of these policies based on SDG indicators, gender parity metrics, and other applicable statistical metrics in order to have a more objective perspective on the policy impact.

#### ***Data Sources***

The data used in this study will be obtained from:

- ***Policy Documents:*** International agreements, domestic gender equality agenda plans, and laws (e.g., CEDAW, Beijing Platform, SDG 2030 Agenda).
- ***Case Studies:*** In-depth cases of countries or regions that have been carrying out gender-responsive governance mechanisms. These case studies will be useful in placing the policy structures in particular socio-political arrangements in perspective.
- ***SDG Indicators:*** The SDG indicators related to gender, such as information about the role of women in decision-making, education, economic opportunities, and violence prevention.
- ***Institutional Reports:*** The reports of the gender-oriented governmental and non-governmental organizations, which assess the policy implementation and the governance structures.

#### ***Analytical Approach***

The comparative analysis approach will be utilized in the study and will be used to assess the variations in gender equality policy frameworks in different countries and regions. The study will determine patterns,

strengths, and weaknesses of policy implementation by comparing mechanisms of governance and their effectiveness. Further, the method of content analysis will help to analyze the language and composition of the policy documents in a systematic way, and how gender equality is built into legal and institutional discourses. Policy analysis will determine the effectiveness of these frameworks by comparing the outcomes that are related to gender, namely, economic empowerment, roles in leadership, and access to education in countries with good governance structures and those with poor policies.

### Theoretical Lens

The paper shall adopt an institutionalist and a feminist policy theory:

The implementation and effectiveness of gender equality policies will be understood by using institutionalism and its theorization through the use of formal institutions (e.g., laws, regulations) and informal institutions (e.g., cultural norms, social practices). The theoretical approach will assist in examining how political and legal systems have contributed to the empowerment (or lack of empowerment) of women.

The intersection of gender, power, and policy will be studied using the feminist policy theory. This direction focuses on the necessity of the policies that would surpass the patriarchal organization and respond to the unequal distribution of power forces that reproduce gender inequality. The policy-making approach proposed by the feminist policy theory embraces gender sensitivity and pays attention to the lived experiences of women, especially within marginalized societal groups.

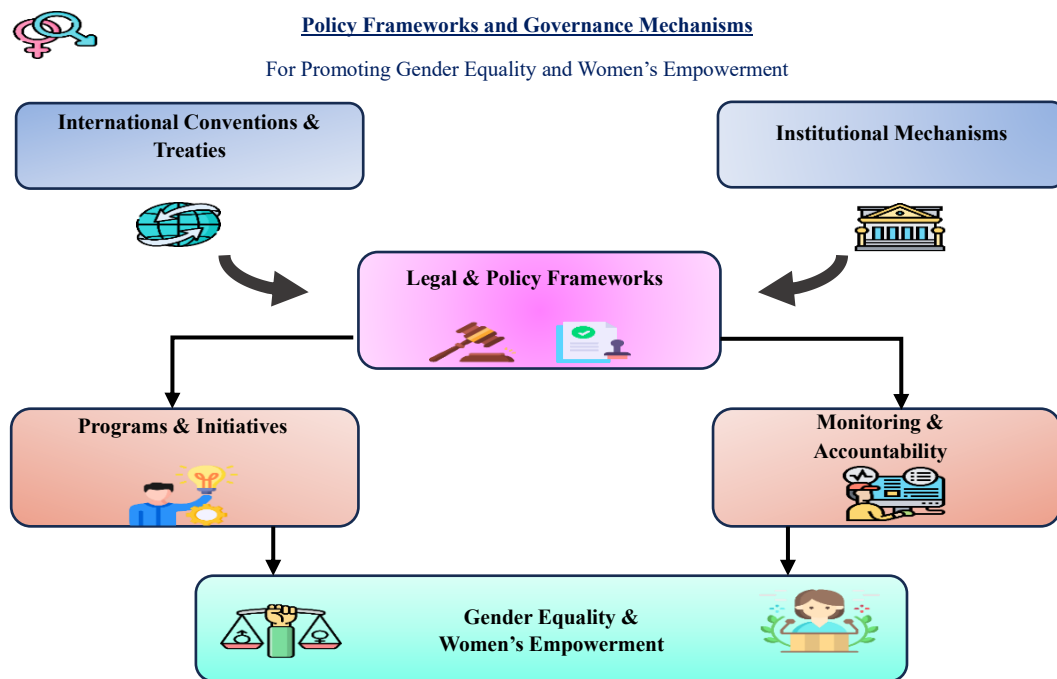


Figure 1: Policy Frameworks and Governance Mechanisms for Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

This figure 1 illustrates the interconnected policy frameworks and governance mechanisms that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. It highlights the relationship between international conventions and treaties, legal and policy frameworks, and institutional mechanisms. The diagram emphasizes the role of programs and initiatives and monitoring and accountability in driving progress towards gender equality. The ultimate goal of these mechanisms is to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment at global, national, and community levels.

## IV. Results

Three themes are the primary ones with the analysis in this section being built around them, namely Policy Frameworks, Governance Mechanisms, and Effectiveness and Gaps. Themes will be considered separately, and the way the policies of gender equality are implemented at various levels (international, regional, national) will be discussed along with the analysis of their efficacy. The results will also draw the gaps that are there, and also factors leading to the success or failure of these policies.

### *Policy Frameworks*

The global norms of gender equality encompassed by international agreements such as CEDAW, SDG 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 5 targets 5.1 (ending discrimination) and 5.c (strengthening policies and legislation) require that countries incorporate gender-sensitive policies in the governance systems. The regional organizations, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and ASEAN also facilitate gender equality through structures such as the Maputo Protocol and the EU Gender Equality Strategy, which aims at eradicating violence, economic empowerment, and political representation. On the national front, countries such as Sweden and Norway have come far with the legislation of equal pay, parental leave, and women's representation. Nonetheless, not all countries are capable of applying these frameworks in their practice, which creates loopholes in resources and opportunities that women can access.

Table 1: Comparison of Policy Frameworks Across Regions

Region/Country	Policy Framework	Key Features	Effectiveness	Challenges
<b>International</b>	CEDAW	Legal framework for women's rights, globally ratified	High global recognition but inconsistent enforcement	Varying national commitments to implementation
<b>Regional</b>	EU Gender Equality Strategy	Equal pay, equal work, combating violence, promoting women in leadership	Effective in member states with strong legal systems	Gaps in enforcement in some member countries
<b>National</b>	Rwanda's Gender Quotas	61% female representation in parliament via gender quotas	Highly effective, global leader in women's political participation	Cultural barriers to full gender equality in rural areas
<b>National</b>	India's National Policy for Women	Focuses on education, health, empowerment, and gender justice	Mixed outcomes in rural and marginalized regions	Limited implementation and resources

Table 1 can be used to capture the key features and efficiency of the key international, regional, and national policy frameworks concerning gender equality.

### *Governance Mechanisms*

Gender equality has been facilitated through governance mechanisms such as gender-specific ministries, national parliamentary committees, and related autonomous entities such as the Gender Equality Bureau in Japan and the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India, which formulate policies and implement them. The legal systems, such as gender-based violence laws, anti-discrimination legislation, and equal remuneration laws, are necessary but, in most cases, ineffective because of either weak legal systems or cultural opposition, as in the Domestic Violence Act of South Africa. It is essential that there should be proper budgetary allocations to gender equality programs, where most of the developed countries, such as Norway and Finland, are leading in funding them, but most of the developing countries find it hard to get enough resources. It requires monitoring and accountability measures, including gender audits and SDG indicators, which are needed to monitor policy effectiveness, and many countries do not have the infrastructure essential to do so effectively, which restricts accountability and development.

Table 2: Governance Mechanisms for Gender Equality

Country/Region	Institutional Mechanisms	Legal Frameworks	Monitoring and Accountability	Budget Allocations
Sweden	Ministry of Gender Equality, National Gender Council	Strong legal protections for women's rights, anti-discrimination laws	Regular gender audits, SDG monitoring	High public spending on gender equality programs
South Africa	Department of Women, Gender, and Youth	Domestic Violence Act, Employment Equity Act	Weak monitoring in rural areas, limited data collection	Low budget allocations for women's empowerment programs
India	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Equal Remuneration Act	Poor enforcement of laws, limited monitoring of gender policies	Limited allocation in national budgets
Brazil	Secretariat for Women's Policy	Comprehensive legal rights for women in political participation, labor, and health	Gender-sensitive national indicators, occasional reviews	Decentralized funding, uneven allocation across states

This table 2 is a comparison of the gender equality governance in Sweden, South Africa, India and Brazil in terms of institutional rules, legal policies, monitoring and budgetary allocations. Sweden boasts of good institutions, legal safeguards and good funding unlike other countries, which have problems such as poor enforcement and insufficient resources. These inequalities indicate that there is a need to enhance better governance systems to allow gender equality.

It is possible to visually depict the regional disparities in governance mechanisms in the SDG 5.c Governance Index chart (figure 2). The chart demonstrates the performances of various regions on the basis of the implementation of gender-responsible policies and governance systems with %ages indicating the effectiveness of the governance structures. The governance index of Europe is the highest; it is 85 and North America comes second with a governance index of 70 and finally Latin America with a governance index of 62. Oceania and Asia are slightly lower with a score of 55% and 48% respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa region has the lowest governance index of 42 which means that there are significant problems in policy implementation and enforcement. This number 2 shows the differences between gender equality governance in the regions and demonstrates that more robust policy frameworks and accountability systems are necessary, especially in the areas with low scores.

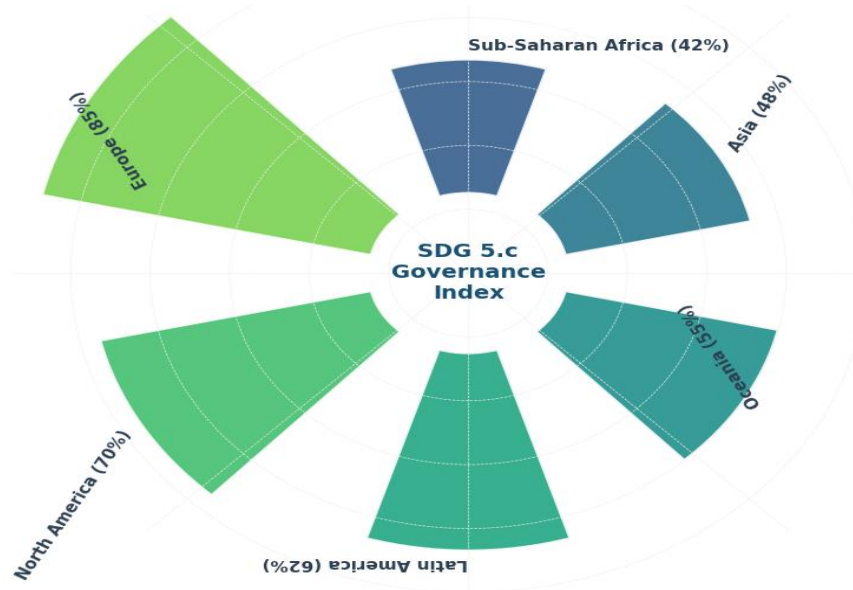


Figure 2: Gender Equality Progress by Region (SDG Indicator 5.c)

## **V. Discussion**

The results of this discussion will give important information about the condition of the governing structures and policy frameworks that work to advance gender equality. They not only emphasize the different levels of success of these frameworks in different areas but also point towards the obstacles that impede the process of achieving SDG 5. In other parts of the world, such as in Europe and North America, there are well-developed systems of governance, such as development of gender equality ministries and strong legal frameworks, as well as sizeable budgets, which allow gender equality to be made a reality. These areas have high governance ratings, which indicate their holistic institutional processes and aggressive policy frameworks. Nevertheless, in these high performing areas, there are still challenges like to make sure that the policies are inclusive and effective to reach the marginalized populations. Conversely, Sub-Saharan Africa is afflicted with poor governance systems whereby institutional set ups and the law are not always applied uniformly. This difference points to the fact that an effective governance mechanism is necessary to promote gender equality but not enough until they are executed effectively and tracked.

Gender equality has an inseparable connection with other SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The consistency of these objectives should be policy-wise to attain the holistic approach to development. Indicatively, other nations that incorporate gender equality in their overall economic and social strategies like the Nordic countries have shown to have improved results among women regarding the aspects of labor force, education, and health. Nonetheless, in most regions, gender equality policies are isolated resulting in a challenge in ensuring interdependent outcomes that are required in order to attain sustainable development. This is hindered integration as gender-targeted policies cannot be as effective as they can be and the importance of cross-sectoral coordination to improve gender equality is emphasized.

In many countries, the progress is still hampered by structural barriers in the form of an established system of patriarchy, discriminatory legal practices, and political will. In Asia, and Latin America, the policies promoting gender equality exist, yet in most cases, the work of such policies is corrupted by the cultural and social standards that limit women access to the labor market and the life in general. Such structural barriers do not only influence policy execution, but also restrict agency of women in such societies. Conversely, there are other opportunities in these same regions which include the increasing awareness of gender equality as one of the fundamental human rights and mounting pressure on the world to improve gender disparities. The use of these opportunities would assist in closing the gaps and creating a more inclusive political environment. Comparing the results with the international standards, it can be seen that Europe and North America are ahead of other countries in terms of policy implementation, the degree of governance, the integration of gender equality as well as political motivation. These areas play a good role to lead the way others, especially in terms of legislative changes, government policy and gender-sensitive budgeting. Nevertheless, the areas where gender pay disparities, female representation in leadership positions, and gender-based violence prevention can be improved even in these areas. Weaker enforcement of the laws and the lack of proper funding and socio-cultural obstacles lead to lagging behind in Sub-Saharan Africa and the specific regions of Asia. Institutional strengthening and policy coherence should be the priority of these regions to make the environment enabling gender equality. These challenges will have to be addressed by a joint initiative to change cultural standards, inject more funds, and upgrade the capabilities of the monitoring mechanism to hold the governments accountable.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This paper has examined how policy frameworks and governance mechanisms are critical towards promoting gender equality and women empowerment in different regions. These discussions indicated the significant differences between territories with Europe and North America having well established governance structures and the effectiveness of policies and Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia having a considerable problem, mainly because of poor enforcement and socio-cultural restrictions. This notwithstanding, gender equality in most areas of the globe is still limited by structural forces like

patriarchal norms and poor budgetary allocation choices. The paper confirms that effective implementation of gender equality policies requires adequate institutional arrangements which include gender ministries and parliamentary committees. Besides, the alignment of gender equality policies with other SDGs is critical to the realization of sustainable development because the goals are closely related to each other. The importance of gender-responsive budgeting and accountability mechanisms as a means of tracking progress is also a vital consideration in making sure that policies result in physical results.

The identified practical implications of this research are the necessity to allocate more funds, change the culture, and coordinate the work of the different sectors in policy-making. Enhancing surveillance regimes and gender sensitive structures will help a great deal in improving efficiency of gender equality programs especially in areas of low governance indicators. The global guidelines like CEDAW and SDG 5 give an overall framework but regional measures are required to address the region-specific problems. To undertake this study in the future, there is a necessity to explore the role of cultural norms in policy adoption in other locations and to determine how gender equality policies can be more effectively merged with economic and social developmental agendas. In addition, additional empirical research on the efficacy of governance mechanisms in the local setting will offer positive information on the challenges and possibilities of advancing gender equality in a variety of socio-political settings.

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