

# A Review of Sustainable Development and Women's Empowerment

<sup>1</sup>Manish Verma, Professor, Centre for Climate Action, Kolkata, India.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Neha Banerjee, Centre for Climate Action, Kolkata, India.

**Abstract:** This paper examines digitalization from the standpoints of development and gender. It looks into which nations and, within those nations, whose demographic groups have so far benefited from the dynamism brought forth by digitalization, particularly through e-commerce and agricultural technology advancements. In addition to other divisions related to gender, age, and socioeconomic issues that affect people's capacity to have access to digital technologies and use them in a constructive and advantageous way, the study highlights the digital divide between developed and developing nations. The analysis focuses on the challenges women experience in gaining access to digitalization and the potential benefits it offers them, particularly in developing nations. The study distinguishes between having access to technology, using it, and using it productively. It also emphasizes the connection between gender and other social and economic disparities. The report offers several recommendations in its conclusions to ensure digitalization benefit everyone equally and leave no one behind. The process of social change is called development. It is more than just a collection of laws and initiatives put in place to achieve specific goals. The greatest issue facing humanity now is still achieving equitable and sustained development. The level of awareness among a nation's citizens determines its course for development. Women's empowerment is a modern concern to bring about sustainable development, regardless of the constituency. Policymakers believe that sustainable development and women are closely related topics. When India gained its independence, it was among the world's poorest nations.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment; Microfinance; Entrepreneurship; Sustainable Development.

(Submitted: September 04, 2024; Revised: October 09, 2024; Accepted: November 13, 2024; Published: December 30, 2024)

## 1. Introduction

There is no precise definition for empowerment. Interestingly, the World Development Report 2000/2001 (WDR) does not define empowerment; instead, the definition must be inferred from the action that the report suggests under the category of "facilitating empowerment" (Aluko & Okuwa, 2018). The suggested activities are divided into three categories: lowering social barriers, increasing the responsiveness of state institutions to the poor, and establishing social capital and institutions. "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in negotiate with influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives," according to the empowerment sourcebook. The mission of reforming the state to make its acts more advantageous to the people is broad and calls for adjustments in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. These modifications fall under the categories of decentralizing authority, advancing democratic politics, improving the legal system, and modernizing public administration. WDR addresses prejudice and social exclusion as obstacles to empowerment (Nahar & Mengo, 2022). In many nations, gender discrimination and the ensuing gender-based inequality in economic and social results are realities. Political, legal, social, and economic repercussions result from this. Generally speaking, women have a far lower percentage of elected office and political influence than men. Both the official legal system and unofficial customs may be to blame for this. The percentage of elected and nonelected political posts held by women can be used to gauge the degree of gender disparity in the political arena (Lawal et al., 2016).

Development is a human process that involves societal change rather than merely a collection of laws and initiatives put in place to achieve specific goals. The vitality and desire of those pursuing development shape the mental process that drives development, much as in humans, rather than the material elements. The nation's population's awareness determines the course of development (Hafsah Batool & Rehman, 2022). Many definitions and meanings of the term "development" have been produced over the years by

different researchers. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, for instance, created the "capability approach," which described development as a tool that gives the nation's citizens the freedom to act as they see fit, including freedom of economic, social, and family acts (Ali Alhazmi, 2023).

## **2. Review of Literature**

While critically analysing the role of credit in fostering microbusinesses in Botswana, Boitomelo (1995) contends that in order for credit to generate income and reduce poverty, women's needs for awareness, capacity building, loan facilities, and education and training must be met.

Sangeetha Purushothaman (1998) uses case studies from four Maharashtra districts to critically analyse the function of women's grassroots organizations in rural development. Given that grassroots women encounter radically different societal and economic circumstances, including fewer financial resources, she highlights the necessity of challenging the very structures that underpin general growth in the villages (Hamed, 2022).

Md. Abu Taher (2000) studied how IGAs affected women's empowerment in Bangladesh's Chittagong District. It was discovered that taking part in IGAs enhanced women's empowerment in terms of more mobility, family decision-making authority, productive asset ownership, political and legal awareness, and self-assurance when taking part in social protests.

In his paper "Gender Bias in South Asia," Mahbud Ulhaq (2001) critically analyses how microfinance might empower women. The author contends that high female loan repayment rates cannot be interpreted as an indicator of how well these loans have empowered women because they do not account for whether women have used their loans effectively or whether male family members have taken control of their credit, further undermining their standing in the family (Pathania, 2017).

In their study, Pallavi Chavan and R. Ramakumar (2002) examine the empirical data on microcredit programs run by NGOs in developing nations and contrast them with state-led initiatives to reduce poverty, such as India's IRDP and RRBs. The review shows that NGO-led microcredit programs and institutions like Grameen Bank have been successful in reaching the target groups of the poor more effectively than state-led microcredit programs in India. This is based on an analysis of four indicators of good performance: financial visibility, employment creation and skill improvement, growth in earnings and asset holdings of the poor, and targeting the poor. However, both could only slightly raise beneficiaries' salaries.

In a survey carried out in Tamil Nadu, Vijayasanthi (2002) shows that after joining SHGs, women had more autonomy to make decisions regarding their children's education, childcare, healthcare, and housing (Gupta et al., 2024).

In her PhD dissertation, Wakoko Florance (2003) notes that whereas men's empowerment is primarily linked to their gender, women's empowerment is significantly impacted by family circumstances in both traditional and non-traditional decision-making domains.

In an article about the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in reducing poverty and empowering women, Anoop Dash (2003) notes that financial services that address more general social needs like empowerment, healthcare, and education are crucial for having a long-lasting and significant impact on the impoverished.

### **Objectives**

1. To examine the research on the subject in order to comprehend the connection between sustainable development and women's empowerment.
2. To emphasize the significance of gender equality and women's empowerment as UN Sustainable Development Goals for global advancement.
3. To use secondary data to investigate the relationships between women's empowerment and sustainable development in order to identify recommendations for accomplishing the goal.

### **3. Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development**

Empowering women is essential to creating a sustainable society. Empowering women increases their access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making authority, all of which improve social, economic, and environmental results. Since women are currently underpowered, the term "women empowerment" itself suggests that they should be granted more authority. Notable progress has been achieved in recent years to help women overcome their helplessness and insignificance. Patriarchal societies suppressed women's independence over the world. Women were restricted to their houses and were not allowed to vote or even voice their thoughts. As time went on, they came to understand that their lives were about much more than just providing for their family. For the first time in history, women's progress became visible as more of them began to break down barriers. Unlike men, women never try to silence the other gender's voice. These hands hold back the hands of all downtrodden people, men and women alike, enabling them to escape poverty while working to better their lot in life (Gupta et al., 2024). Although the nation's economy is improving, it still needs to give social and human development, women's empowerment, and other factors top priority. Women's empowerment and economic contribution are essential to advancing women's rights, giving them the ability to take control of their life, and influencing society. The following are the priorities:

While women's empowerment has improved over the past, not all Indian states have reached the same level of empowerment.

States differ in the relationships between various aspects of empowerment and the adoption of family planning methods at the moment.

Compared to India's northern states, women in the southern states are more empowered to make decisions for the home. Nonetheless, northern states have high levels of women's empowerment in terms of employment and education. Traditional methods of contraception are the most common in both regions.

In states in eastern and western India, traditional norms that require women to handle home chores under the watchful eye of their husbands or even mothers-in-law stifle women's ability to make decisions about their health.

Compared to other parts of India, the Northeastern states have a lower diversity in the degree of women's empowerment. However, the tribal belt's lack of knowledge about medical facts, inadequate infrastructure that prevents information from reaching them, and the belief that using contraceptives could negatively impact their health prevent them from adopting these techniques.

Because family planning is a component of women's right to life and health choices in addition to being a method of birth control and population stabilization, the study does not align with ICPD ethics.

Therefore, in order to accomplish solitary empowerment, diversity of empowerment should be minimized and equity should be achieved. Following that, all government initiatives aimed at reorienting family planning services ought to be focused on different aspects of women's empowerment, particularly their ability to make decisions and their economic presence in society.

### **4. Analysis**

In many areas of life, such as the workplace and the home, discrimination against women is pervasive. This could restrict their access to employment and educational opportunities, lead to unjust treatment, and result in lower pay.

Significant obstacles stand in the way of women's education and employment. Women's incapacity to work as a result of cultural and societal constraints, limited access to education and training, and other issues is the cause of this.

Table 1: Role of Social and Cultural Norms in Shaping Women's Empowerment

Relation	Path coefficient	t- value	p-value	Bias- corrected 95% confidence interval
What are the consequences of conforming to or challenging social and cultural norms for women's empowerment?	0.329	3.072	0.002	(0.098, 0.515)
How do women from different socio-cultural backgrounds experience and navigate social and cultural norms that impact their empowerment?	0.355	4.027	0.000	(0.169, 0.524)
What are the specific social and cultural norms that restrict or promote women's empowerment in different societies?	0.614	7.935	0.000	(0.443, 0.750)
How do social and cultural norms intersect with other factors (e.g., economic, political, educational) to impact women's empowerment?	0.684	11.034	0.000	(0.502, 0.773)
What are the dominant social and cultural norms that shape women's roles and expectations in different cultural contexts?	0.318	4.219	0.000	(0.167, 0.457)

Table 2: Impact of Patriarchal Systems and Gender-based Violence on Women's Empowerment

Latent constructs	Importance (Total effects)	Performance (Index values)	Importance (Total effects)	Performance (Index values)	Importance (Total effects)	Performance (Index values)
	ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS		FINANCIAL BENEFITS		SOCIAL BENEFITS	
Economic Abuse	0.232	75.714	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sexual Violence	0.294	73.810	NA	NA	NA	NA
Physical Violence:	0.314	80.357	NA	NA	NA	NA
Power Imbalance	0.164	62.381	0.080	62.381	0.176	62.381
Sexist Attitudes	0.143	50.714	0.055	50.714	0.153	50.714
Policy and Legislative Frameworks	0.053	66.786	0.092	66.786	0.058	66.786
Access to Resources	0.135	71.071	0.252	71.071	0.148	71.071
Coping Mechanisms	0.078	46.667	0.100	46.667	0.087	46.667
Social Support	0.065	55.000	0.074	55.000	0.073	55.000
Loss of Autonomy	0.064	62.857	0.095	62.857	0.071	62.857
Economic Disempowerment	0.070	72.857	0.133	72.857	0.078	72.857
Social Isolation	NA	NA	0.142	51.429	NA	NA
Psychological Trauma	NA	NA	0.145	73.571	NA	NA

According to recent estimates of poverty from the Pardee Center for International Futures, UN Women, and UNDP, millions of women and girls will live in extreme poverty worldwide. In addition to creating barriers to women's access to school and work, poverty can negatively impact women's nutrition and overall health. In contrast to 10.5% of males, 15% of working-age women worldwide do not have a job despite seeking one, according to the brief, which highlights fresh data on gender discrepancies in the labor market. Between 2005 and 2022, this gender disparity has remained mostly unchanged. Even though women's basic health and education metrics have improved dramatically over the last decade, authorities must take into account the reality that women's socioeconomic and political autonomy are crucial to realizing their full potential. The growth of development projects throughout the country and the growing unrelenting exploitation of natural resources have caused the scope and intensity of ecological movements in independent India to swiftly expand. Women in India have long had a closer bond with the natural world and have made substantial contributions to protecting it. As a result, it is critical to keep encouraging women to take up leadership roles and participate in decision-making processes at the local level.

## 5. Conclusion

Closing any remaining gaps is therefore crucial for India and its policymakers. Women and concerns that impact them require greater attention in addition to the nation's current policy. When it comes to giving women enough access to and accurate information about their health, education, public policies, programs, etc., as well as encouraging them to participate in the political, economic, and environmental domains, both

public and private stakeholders have a big part to play. The employment of conventional and digital media to better the lives of women across all social strata must be prioritized. For sustainable development, women's empowerment is not only essential, but also necessary. The objective is to leave no one behind without destroying resources for future generations. Although we are all learning and developing, ignorance is not bliss, and sustainability is a personal viewpoint, thus women's contribution to it—whether it be socially, politically, or economically—cannot be disregarded. In order to guarantee global progress, we must promote increasing female involvement, find any legal loopholes, and make sure that laws are applied correctly.

## References

- [1] Aluko, Y. A., & Okuwa, O. B. (2018). Innovative solutions and women empowerment: Implications for sustainable development goals in Nigeria. *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development*, 10(4), 441-449.
- [2] Nahar, S., & Mengo, C. W. (2022). Measuring women's empowerment in developing countries: A systematic review. *Journal of International Development*, 34(2), 322-333.
- [3] Lawal, F. A., Ayoade, O. E., & Taiwo, A. A. (2016). Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development in Africa.
- [4] Hafsa Batool, M. I., & Rehman, A. (2022). The Impact Of Women's Empowerment On Sustainable Development In The District Of Sargodha. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8), 5193-5211.
- [5] Ali Alhazmi, A. (2023). Women's Empowerment Through Higher Education as a Key Factor in Sustainable Development. *International Journal of Learning Management Systems*, 11(4), 63-72.
- [6] Hamed, G. H. (2022). Literature Review Article: Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development Goals. *Egyptian Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences*, 3(1), 11-16.
- [7] Pathania, S. K. (2017). Sustainable development goal: Gender equality for women's empowerment and human rights. *International Journal of research*, 5(4), 1-15.
- [8] Gupta, S., Wei, M., Tzempelikos, N., & Shin, M. M. (2024). Women empowerment: challenges and opportunities for sustainable development goals. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 27(4), 608-630.