



Millennium Development Goal 3:

To Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are immensely grateful to **Dr. Dhir Jhingran** (Senior Advisor, Education, UNICEF India), **Mr. Ambarish Rai** (National Convenor, RTE Forum), **Ms. Dipa Nag Chowdry** (Deputy Director, MacArthur Foundation India), **Ms. Indrani Bhattacharya** (Assisted Director, CINI), **Mr. Rajib Halder** (Additional Director, CINI), for their time and valuable inputs to validate the findings of the report.

We would also like to thank the team at Athena Infonomics India Private Ltd., (Chennai) for their assistance with writing and designing the report.

We are thankful to the members of the Save the Children India team for their effort in bringing out this report in time for the 500 days countdown for the MDGs.

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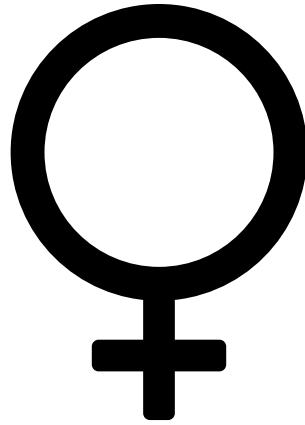
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In many parts of the world, even today, women and girls are exposed to the perils of gender discrimination right from the time they are conceived and continue to remain marginalized by a society that relentlessly reinforces gender biases throughout their lives. There is no statistic more telling of this situation than the fact that **two-thirds of the illiterates globally are women**. Women currently make up 50% of the global population and high rates of female illiteracy are bound to prove disastrous in the long run, severely hampering any effort toward improving human conditions anywhere in the world. Studies that examine a correlation between gender equality and literacy and their collective impact on the progress of human development indicators establish a direct and unequivocal connection between the two.

Women and their families benefit greatly even from the slightest improvement in access to education and health care: **an extra year of secondary schooling for girls can increase women's future wages by 10 to 20%; infant and child mortality rates reduce dramatically with improvements in levels of female literacy; a minimum of 6 years of education for women is associated with a 16.0% reduction in under five mortality, and if all women had 12 years of education, under 5 mortality rates would fall sharply by a further 42.9%.**^[1] Any investment toward improving rates of female literacy is bound to have positive and enduring impact on the overall health, poverty and social security conditions of men, women and children in the world.

With the 2015 deadline for the Millennium goals approaching, it is time we acknowledge and reiterate the urgent need to focus our attention to the education and social security needs of women around the world, if we are to make any sustainable progress on our human development ambitions. All our efforts to improve the living conditions of men, women and children around the world will be rendered futile if we fail to acknowledge that gender equality is not just one of the many developmental challenges that India faces, but that it is by far the most critical.



1. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education



2. Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old



3. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector



4. Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliament



Source: MDG India Country Report(2014)

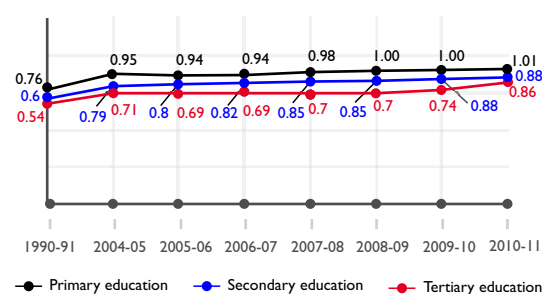
Indicator	Target	Achieved	On Course
Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education	1.00	Primary 1.00	Goal reached
		Secondary 0.88	On Track
		Tertiary 0.88	On Track
Ratio of male to female literacy (15-24 year olds)	1.00	0.88	On Track
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector	50%	19.3%	Slow/off track
Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliament	50%	11.6%	Slow/off track

India is a microcosm of the trends observed across the developing world with respect to gender equality and women empowerment – women make up a little less than 50% of the total population in the country and are represented in all walks of life, albeit as a minority. Appreciable improvements have been made with respect to women and girl's education and gender parity indices (GPI) - the ratio of the number of female students enrolled education to the number of male students in each level – have shown tremendous improvements across all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary levels). **The GPI at the primary level in India now stands at a ratio of 1:1 which indicates that an equal number of boys and girls are currently enrolled in primary schools in India.**^[2]

The good news, however, seems to end there. India has made very little progress on all the other indicators of women's empowerment: even after a decade and half of significant policy interventions, **the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has risen only marginally from 12.7% in 1990 to 19.3% in 2011-12**^[3] indicating an extremely slow pace of assimilation of women into the better paying non-agricultural and non-traditional labour markets. The incidence of poverty is observed to be highest of all among the landless wage earners who provide largely unskilled labor in markets where the prevalence of long-term contracts has been declining; rural female laborers are more likely than men to depend on daily wages from such manual employment.

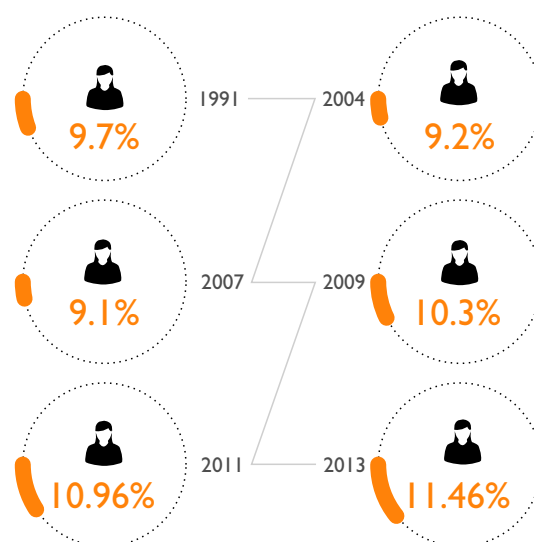
It is ironic that despite the fact that women occupy some of the most powerful seats of national and regional politics in the country today, **the proportion of seats held by women in the parliament has shown a only slight increase from 5% in 1990 to 11.46% during 2013.**^[4] Among the nominations fielded by the two major national parties in the 2014 General Elections, women made up only 13% and 9% of the total nominations from these parties respectively. Political participation of women is seen to be the highest in states where female literacy is relatively high reinforcing the impact of literacy on women's social and political empowerment.

Gender Parity Index in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education in India: A Trend



Source: DISE Elementary Flash Statistics

Trend of women's participation in the National Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha)



Source: Electoral Statistics, Election Commission India 2014



Women and Work



Gross Budgetary Support for the Twelfth Five year plan (2012-17), share of allocations for women's development (except child development in MWCD) amounts to a meager **0.2%**.

Among BRIC nations, India has the lowest female participation rate with only **29% women** over the age of 15 in the work force.^[5]

The proportion of working women in urban areas increased from **11.9% in 2001** to **15.4% in 2011**. More than one in ten jobs created for women around this time were informal domestic work.^[3]

In rural areas, households headed by females have a **poverty ratio of 29.4%**.^[3]

Significant policy interventions



The first major development toward ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment in India was the enactment of National Policy for the Empowerment of Women during the year 2001, with the main aim of bringing about social change in attitude towards women and women empowerment. In order to operationalise the approach formulated under the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, the government has designed various policies, programmes and initiatives by mainstreaming gender development into the development planning enabling vast education and employment opportunities for women in India.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Government of India's flagship programme to universalise elementary education) has been entrusted with the responsibility to ensure enhanced access and retention of girls in schools.

Several other initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development for empowerment of adolescent girls such as Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) – have been playing their part in addressing several socio-economic barriers to gender equality.

The UNDP Human Development Report 2013 estimates that only **29%** of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were a part of the country's labor force, compared to **80.7%** men.

Nearly **50%** of agricultural labourers in the rural areas fall below the poverty line and **women**, who form the majority of the workforce in this sector, bear the brunt of **poverty and socio-economic exclusion**.

States' progress on gender equality



Perhaps the most telling statistic about the status of female literacy in India is the fact that **Kerala is the only state to have achieved 100% female literacy rate** while states like Bihar, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh have registered alarmingly high rates of female illiteracy of over 50%. Notably, states with low levels of female literacy also have very low female representation in regional politics: women make up less than 10% of the total political representation in Legislative Assemblies and Panchayats in states like Bihar, Daman & Diu, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.



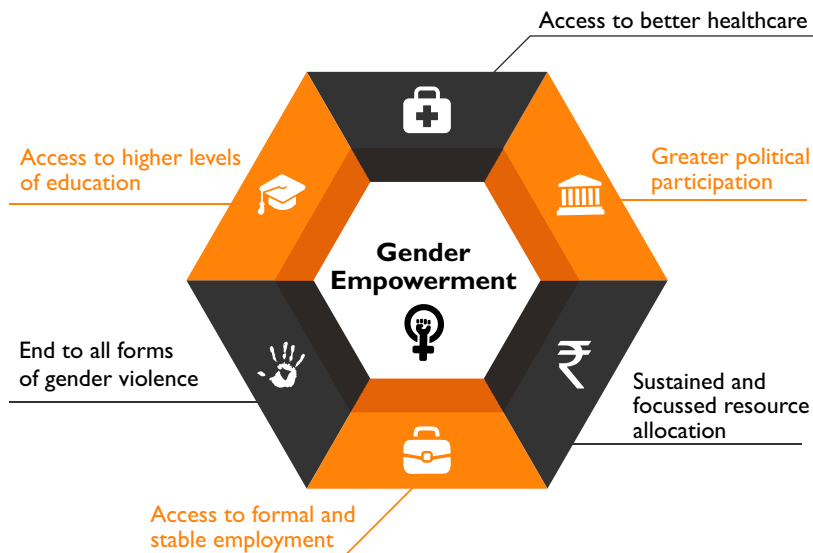
Issues of gender based discrimination and violence impact millions of women in India everyday. While incidence of rape and physical abuse are reported widely in the media today, evoking mass outrage from the general public, Indian women continue to fight silent battles everyday, against societal aggression and exclusion in the form of inaccessible health care, lack of basic sanitation facilities and pervasive risk of abuse and exploitation. According to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2013, India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the gender inequality index – the lowest rank among all South Asian countries with the exception of Afghanistan.

While India has made significant strides in reducing the gender parity across all levels of education, women's participation in the work force continues to lag severely behind, resulting in the loss of substantial gains made from improved access to education. **The UNDP Human Development Report 2013 estimates that only 29% of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were a part of the country's labor force, compared to 80.7% men.** Under representation of women in the work force has long-standing impact on the overall socio-economic status of women and exacerbates the existing issues of gender inequality. Nearly 50% of agricultural labourers in the rural areas fall below the poverty line and women, who form the majority of the workforce in this sector, bear the brunt of such chronic poverty.

2015 and beyond



The issue of gender equality and empowerment cannot be treated in isolation with other developmental challenges that India faces. There is a definite gender dimension to every social and economic problem that India is trying to overcome and the Government and civil society must collectively approach issues of gender inequality with a sense of urgency and purpose. Poverty and illiteracy are linked inextricably and we must ensure that our women are able to liberate themselves from the clutches of poverty by providing them equal access to quality education at all levels.



Women's participation in public life in India needs serious attention – we need women in positions of power and able to mobilise political action toward formulating policies that accord due attention and resources to issues that affect the lives and livelihoods of women in India.

The sustainable development goals talk about greater access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and this is a pertinent issue in India for its post 2015 development agenda – **currently less than 60% of women in the reproductive age use any form of contraception largely due to a lack of awareness and access.**^[6] This greatly impacts women's ability toward family planning.

Sexual and physical violence continue to affect the lives of millions of women in India and crimes such as rape and domestic violence are so pervasive that they have been normalized by society that accepts violence against

women as an unavoidable 'hazard'. **Rape cases in India have doubled between 1990 and 2008 and the latest estimate suggests a new case every 22 minutes. The conviction rate for rape remains shockingly low at 24.2%.**^[7] Through education and other means of public engagement, the Government and civil society must come together and adopt a collective stance against gender violence and treat it as one of the most heinous crimes and ensure.

All said and done, gender equality will remain a distant dream if the underlying structural inefficiencies like limited access to education, health care and formal employment are not addressed with a certain degree of political will and vigour. Poverty tends to have the most debilitating effect on any progress on gender equality and we must formulate policies that systematically help women in India break out of the vicious cycle and for India to emerge as a 'Gender Equal and Empowered nation'.

Save the Children's Charter of Demands



- Allocate 10% of Plan fund for gender budget which currently stands at less than 6% of the total budget allocation
- Enact the 33% Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament and State Assemblies for women.
- Legislation for at least 50% reservation for women in urban and rural decision making bodies
- Enact legislation to guarantee minimum and equal wages and maternity benefit, pensions and other social security for female agricultural workers
- Ensure implementation of the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act' and all the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee Report.
- Provide free and compulsory education in the age group 0-18 years with special emphasis on the girl child.
- Enact legislation to ensure women's property rights especially for women from the most marginalized communities.
- Ensure timely justice and adequate compensation to the victims of physical violence, particularly rape survivors and children
- Treat crimes 'honour killings' carried out by khap Panchayats as illegal and inadmissible with legal implications for the Panchayat leaders who issue such diktats.
- Enact a law for equal rights in marital and inherited property for all women
- Design school curricula to include content on gender equality and promote discussions among students, girls and boys alike, on matters like gender bias and discrimination.
- Strengthen the independent functioning of the National and State Commissions for Women and make the appointment of members a transparent and meaningful process.
- Sensitise the judiciary and the police force to deal with gender crimes appropriately
- Create livelihood opportunities for women who are single mothers, widows, sole bread-winners for their families

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