



Enhancing Sustainable Development and Gender Equality through Women's Education

Mamta Rani, Rupinder Kaur

¹Assistant Professor (Economics), Law Department, Swami Vivekanand College of Law, Banur, Punjab, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

mamtamahajan20@gmail.com

Received: 19 Aug 2026; Received in revised form: 16 Sep 2026; Accepted: 20 Sep 2026; Available online: 24 Sep 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Education is widely recognized to provide benefits for women's empowerment and the progress of the nation. The present paper aims to investigate how education enhances women's socioeconomic status and benefits society. The study is based on secondary data sources. The data are taken from the Education Statistics at a Glance, 2018 reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, annual reports of the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, and various web sources. The paper explores the relationship between women's education, gender equality, and sustainable development. The government of India's various initiatives and schemes for women's education are also discussed in the paper. This study presents a thorough analysis and highlights that increasing investments in women's education are strategically vital for women's empowerment, promoting gender equality, and sustainable development.



Keywords— Empowerment, gender equality, investment, sustainable development, women's education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a valuable resource for the development of any country. Education is essential for empowering women and girls because it gives women the information and abilities, they need to question discriminatory conventions and actively participate in decision-making. But without enhancing women's status within the existing economic structure, empowerment in this sense is unachievable (Wani, 2020). The economic and health status of society is directly influenced by the education of women (Bhagavatheswan et al., 2016). Education for the empowerment of women encompasses more than just formal education. It also includes part-time education for adults from all educational backgrounds who are already employed and involved in development initiatives (Oyelude and Bamigbola, 2012).

Development that prioritizes social justice, gender equality, ecological integrity, and human well-being both now and in the future is known as sustainable development (Leach et al., 2014). Education for women is essential for sustainable

development because it promotes more equitable and efficient resource allocation when women hold leadership roles. Many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically address the development of women. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) aims to ensure that all people have access to inclusive, high-quality education. The main elements of SDG 4 are programs to improve girls' education, eliminate gender stereotypes from teaching materials, and establish safe learning environments. The objective of Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to empower all women and attain gender equality. Gender equality and education also have connections to other SDGs, including economic growth (SDG 8), health and well-being (SDG 3), and the eradication of poverty (SDG 1).

The term 'gender equality', sometimes known as 'equality between men and women', describes the rights, obligations, and opportunities that are equal for men and women, as well as girls and boys. Gender equality means acknowledging the diversity of various groups of men and women and

considering the needs, interests, and priorities of both sexes. When women have the right kind of power to acquire and enhance their financial stability, they open new employment opportunities, broaden the pool of talent in the nation, and increase the number of human resources accessible (Hasin and Musa, 2018).

Keeping all the above facts in mind, the fundamental goal of this research is to explain the necessity of financing women's education to empower them and comprehend the connection between gender equality, sustainable development, and women's education. The paper also includes a discussion of initiatives and programs that the Indian government has put in place to promote women's education.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To elucidate the need to fund women's education to empower them.
- To understand the relationship between women's education, gender equality, and sustainable development.
- To discuss the various initiatives and schemes launched by the Indian government to support women's education

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on secondary data sources. The data on the Literacy Rate in India is collected from the Education Statistics at a Glance, 2018. The data is also collected from the reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, annual reports of the Department of Higher Education and Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, and different web sources.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Status of Women's Education in India

Table 1 provides data on India's overall literacy rate as well as the literacy rates for males and females. A perusal of the table shows that the literacy rate of males and females is continuously increasing in India, but females' literacy rate is less than males' in every census year.

4.2 Status of Female Enrollment Rate in India

India's female enrollment rate in schools and colleges has increased over the years, marking a major advancement in the country's female education system. Table 2 shows the Gross Enrollment Ratio in India. A perusal of the table shows that the total gross enrolment ratio in India has increased from 21.5 per cent in 2012-13 to 27.1 per cent in

2019-20. The gross enrolment ratio of males increased from 22.7 per cent in 2012-13 to 26.9 per cent in 2019-20, whereas the gross enrolment ratio of females increased from 20.1 per cent in 2012-13 to 27.3 per cent in 2019-20, which shows that the gross enrolment ratio of females is rising more than males in India.

Table 1: Literacy Rate in India (In Percentage)

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	73.0	80.9	64.6

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in India (In Percentage)

Year	Male GER	Female GER	Total GER
2012-13	22.7	20.1	21.5
2013-14	23.9	22.0	23.0
2014-15	25.3	23.2	24.3
2015-16	25.4	23.5	24.5
2016-17	26.0	24.5	25.2
2017-18	26.3	25.4	25.8
2018-19	26.3	26.4	26.3
2019-20	26.9	27.3	27.1

Source: DSE Annual Report 2021-22

4.3 Socio-Economic Impacts of Investing in Women's Education

Investing in women's education helps prevent extremism and conflict by fostering resilience and a sense of community, fostering multicultural awareness, and giving them the tools to think critically. Education helps advance the economy by enabling women to innovate, start their businesses, and join the workforce. It gives women the capacity to take part in political processes, fight for their rights, and influence decisions at all societal levels. Investing in women's education and leadership can help

nations create more responsive and inclusive governance structures that cater to the interests and concerns of all citizens. There is a substantial correlation between poverty alleviation and women's education. Women with greater education tend to have fewer children and have better health outcomes, which improves family well-being and decreases dependency on social support systems.

1. The Nexus of Women's Education, Gender Equality, and Sustainable Development

The education and empowerment of women are essential to achieving sustainable development, advancing gender equality, and creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Gender equality begins with providing equal access to education for all sexes. As more women hold leadership positions, gender equality is advanced, and aspirations for similar jobs are raised in the next generation. Those with higher levels of education are more inclined to support gender equality at work and in their communities. Prioritizing women's education can help countries achieve SDG 4, which seeks universal access to inclusive, high-quality education. The attainment of environmental sustainability goals is eventually facilitated by the greater capacity that educated women must contribute to activities aimed at conservation, climate action, and sustainable resource management. Women who receive high-quality education are more likely to question gender stereotypes, fight for their rights, and engage fully in society. This helps achieve SDG 5, which is to empower all women and girls.

2. Government Initiatives and Schemes for Promoting Women's Education in India

• National Girl Child Day

India observes National Girl Child Day on January 24 each year to increase public awareness of the value of educating girls and the difficulties they confront. Numerous events and initiatives are planned on this day to support the education and empowerment of girls. The purpose of the celebration is to draw attention to the value of education for girls and to address the numerous issues that Indian girls confront, including violence, discrimination, and limited educational opportunities.

• Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme was established in 2015 to address the decreasing child-sex ratio and advance female education. Several initiatives are included in the plan, including public awareness-raising, enhancing ICDS's capabilities, school and education system building, and facilitating girls' education. The program offers funding for girls' health and education and concentrates on districts with low child sex ratio.

• Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme

This program was started in 2004 to give girls from underprivileged backgrounds access to school. Residential schools are established for females under the program in areas with low rates of female literacy. The schools offer instruction up to the eighth grade in addition to hostel accommodations. Girls from minority communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and low-income households in challenging locations are to be given access to educational opportunities through this program.

• Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan

This program was introduced in 2009. It intends to raise the standard of instruction in India's secondary schools. Under the program, the State Governments are responsible for implementing the plan and releasing the funding to the schools via them. Schools receive funding to upgrade facilities, train teachers, and enact policies that support girls.

• National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education

The Indian government launched the National Scheme of Incentives to Females for Secondary Education in 2008 to encourage females to pursue secondary education. The scheme provides financial aid to families as a means of encouraging them to enroll their daughters in secondary education.

• Udaan Scheme

The goal of the scheme is to encourage the enrollment of female students by advancing the education of girl children. The objective is to bridge the knowledge gap that exists between engineering entrance exams and schooling. Through financial aid and academic support, it aims to increase the number of female students enrolled in esteemed technical education institutions.

• Mahila Samakhyas Programme

The Indian government started a program called the Mahila Samakhyas Programme in 1988. Through awareness-raising and education, it seeks to empower women, especially those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The program's main goal is to increase women's participation in social, cultural, and economic spheres through the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. The program gives women access to both formal and non-formal education to raise the percentage of female literacy.

• Sakshar Bharat Programme

With the inauguration of Saakshar Bharat in 2009, the National Literacy Mission underwent a makeover. It targets female literacy as a vital tool for women's

empowerment and seeks to expedite adult education for women (aged 15 and above) who do not have access to formal education.

- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)**

Under the direction of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is an autonomous national organization in India. It was founded in 1993 to help low-income women get credit support for their socioeconomic advancement. RMK helps women become more financially stable by giving them access to microcredit services. It frequently provides training seminars and capacity-building programs to improve the abilities of female entrepreneurs.

- **National Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Girls**

This program offers girls from Scheduled Tribes (ST) financial aid so they can pursue higher education. The scholarship is awarded to girls who are enrolled in a higher education program and have passed the tenth-standard examination.

3. Strategies for enhancing access to quality education for women

- The government should make investments in the creation of female-focused educational institutions that specifically meet the requirements and difficulties experienced by indigenous and underprivileged girls.
- Digital literacy skills and technological access are crucial in the modern digital world. To increase girls' access to digital tools and improve their educational chances, investment projects should be implemented.
- Initiatives should be launched to directly assist the tribe in understanding the needs and benefits of a girl child's education. To ensure enduring and culturally appropriate solutions, involve parents, senior citizens, and local leaders in the decision-making process.
- The government should invest in and collaborate with local authorities and organizations to provide schools, libraries, and sanitation facilities in backward communities. These amenities are necessary to establish a positive learning environment.
- Awareness campaigns should be launched to educate women about all aspects of development, including social, mental, physical, psychological, religious, and economic.
- Investment should be made to provide skill development and vocational training specific to the requirements of women. They can break the cycle of poverty and pursue sustainable livelihoods with the help of these skills.

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that while both genders' literacy rates in India are steadily rising, women's literacy rates consistently lag behind men's in each census year. Further research reveals that from 2012–13 to 2019–20, girls' gross enrolment ratio increased steadily and exceeded that of men. This research indicates that investment in women's education can contribute to the overall development of communities. Women can gain more influence through education in several ways. Women's awareness, social skills, and overall quality of life can all be enhanced by increasing their educational attainment. The education of women is directly linked to both gender inequality and sustainable growth. They can restore their status through education, which also removes inequities and impediments. Education helps demolish damaging stereotypes and fosters acceptance of a range of gender identities by fostering critical reflection.

The Indian government has introduced several programs to support girls' education. However, in the public education system, gender equality must be actively promoted. Gender equality and sustainable development can be achieved by decreasing differences in employment, income, decision-making, and leadership opportunities through access to high-quality education. Reducing gender inequality and empowering women requires gender-specific initiatives in the areas of education, health, nutrition, agriculture, and trade. Policies that present new ways of helping women must move forward. Microfinance can play a major role in enabling severely underprivileged women to seek education, escape poverty, and achieve financial independence. Policymakers and practitioners may create policies that will move us all closer to a future that is more egalitarian, inclusive, and sustainable by considering the crucial role that women play as positive change agents.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bhagavatheeswan, L., Nair, S., Stone, H., Isac, S., Hiremath, T., Raghavendra, T., Vadde, K., & Beattie, T. S. (2016). The barriers and enablers to education among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe adolescent girls in northern Karnataka, South India: A qualitative study, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 49, 262-270.
- [2] DSE Annual Report (2021-22). Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education and Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India, Available: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/annual_report_eng.pdf
- [3] Educational Statistics at a Glance (2018). Department of School Education & Literacy Statistics Division, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India,

Available:

https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/statistics/report_in_PDF/ESAG-2018.pdf

- [4] Hasin, F., Hasan, A.K.M.B., & Musa, H. (2018). Women empowerment model: strategies to overcome challenges, *Journal of Fundamental and Applied Sciences*, 10(1S), 1068-1083.
- [5] Leach, M., Mehta, L., & Prabhakaran, P. (2014). Gender equality and sustainable development: a pathway approach, *The UN Women Discussion Paper*, 13, Available: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2016/DPS-Gender-equality-sustainable-development.pdf>
- [6] Oyelude, A.A. & Bamigbola, A.A. (2013). Women empowerment through access to information: the strategic roles of non-governmental organizations in Nigeria, *US-China Education Review B*, 3(2), 103-115.
- [7] Wani, I. A. (2020). Women empowerment: Prospects and Challenges, *Greater Kashmir*, Available: <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/opinion/women-empowerment-prospects-and-challenges/#bypass-sw>