

# Creating a Sustainable World by Responsible Business: Gender Inequality

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**Abstract:** *Gender inequality, particularly affecting women, persists globally. In India, it is exacerbated by a patriarchal society, poverty, and unequal access to education. Addressing these root causes is essential for creating a more sustainable and equitable world.*

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Sustainability, Patriarchy, Education Access

## 1. Introduction

Gender inequality is the unequal treatment of people based on their gender. It is a pervasive problem that affects people of all genders, but women and girls disproportionately suffer from its effects. Gender inequality manifests in different ways, including unequal access to education and health care, unequal pay and job opportunities, and unequal representation in political and economic decision making. The root causes of gender inequality are often deeply embedded in cultural norms and reinforced by religious, political, and economic structures. These norms can include gender roles and expectations, a lack of legal protections for women and girls, and a lack of access to education and economic opportunities.

## 2. Extent of the Gender Inequality

According to the United Nations, in 2019 women accounted for only 39% of total employment. However, in 2020 they accounted for 45% of global employment losses. It also estimated that it would take another 40 years for women to be represented equally in National Political Leadership.

In India specifically, we have a long way to go. In the Global gender gap index, India ranked 135 out of 146 countries. According to the United Nations, 27.3% of women aged 20–24 years old in India were married or in a union before age 18. As of February 2021, only 14.4% of seats in parliament were held by women. Further, in 2018, 18.4% of women aged 15-49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

## 3. Root Causes of Gender Inequality in India

### 3.1 Patriarchal society

Historically, India has been a patriarchal society where men have always occupied positions of authority. Decisions and matters related to women's life and development have always been governed by men in their lives. Women for the most part have not had a say on important matters in their lives.

### 3.2 Poverty

Poverty robs women of their basic human rights. It does not allow them to access resources to become a contributing member to the society and economy at large. This results in deprivation in their own lives and is one of the largest contributors to economic dynamism.

### 3.3 Lack of education

There is great disparity between the literacy rates of men and women in India. Some states like Kerala fare better than others. The government has implemented various initiatives to bridge this divide, but due to lack of awareness and access most women are unable to reap the benefits of these initiatives.

### 3.4 Social Customs, Beliefs and Practices

Most customs and beliefs place men on a pedestal. They are the breadwinners in most homes and women are assigned the role of caregivers. Hence, from adolescence itself their role is resigned to the domestic sphere and is limited to being at home. This trend has a tangible effect on the workforce composition since most women do not pursue any economic activity.

## 4. Impact on business and stakeholders

According to a McKinsey Global Institute report, between \$12 trillion and \$28 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality. The public, private, and social sectors will have to work together to close gender gaps in the society.

Gender equality in the workplace can benefit businesses in a variety of ways. When there is equal representation of both genders in the workplace, businesses can benefit from a larger and more diverse talent pool. This can bring new perspectives and skills to businesses and can help to create a better working environment for all employees.

Gender equality can also lead to improved productivity, since studies have shown that diverse teams tend to be more creative and innovative. Additionally, gender equality can

help to reduce the risk of discrimination lawsuits, as well as improve the public image of the business.

Some important benefits of gender equality on businesses are:

#### 4.1 Improves bottom line

Empowering women can have a significant impact on the profitability and productivity of a business. When a business focuses on gender equality in the society as a whole, Gender equality can improve the bottom line of a business in several ways. First, it can lead to a more productive, efficient, and motivated workforce. Companies with gender equality have been found to have higher employee engagement, higher job satisfaction, and fewer employee turnover rates. This leads to lower costs and improved productivity. Second, gender equality can lead to increased customer loyalty and brand recognition. Customers are more likely to trust and support companies that prioritize gender equality, leading to increased sales and profits. Finally, gender equality can attract and retain a more diverse talent pool, which can help businesses better serve their customer base and identify new market opportunities.

#### 4.2 Attracts and maintains right talent

Gender equality at the workplace allows a business to tap into a wider set of talent with diverse skills. Further, focusing on gender equality at the workplace and introducing programs and measures to make the workplace more inclusive helps in retaining talented women employees. Measures like introducing work from home and parental leaves allow women to maintain work life balance, which again is helpful in attracting potential employees.

#### 4.3 Boosts innovation

Gender diversity in the workplace can lead to more innovative ideas and more successful outcomes. Teams with both male and female members are more likely to come up with higher-quality solutions to problems. They are also more likely to collaborate better, leading to improved communication and better decision-making. Furthermore, having a gender-balanced team can help to create a more inclusive environment, which can increase motivation and productivity. All of these benefits combined can lead to more creative and innovative outcomes.

#### 4.4 Enhances customer loyalty and brand image

Customer loyalty and brand image can be improved through gender equality by showing customers that the company is inclusive and treats all genders fairly. This can be achieved through initiatives such as offering equal opportunities regardless of gender and implementing policies that promote equitable wages and benefits for both sexes. Additionally, companies can showcase and promote their commitment to gender equality through their marketing and advertising efforts. By doing so, customers will be more likely to have a positive view of the company and be more likely to remain loyal.

## 5. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme was introduced by the Indian government in 2015 to address gender discrimination in the country. The objective of the scheme is to raise awareness around gender bias prevalent in the subcontinent.

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana aims to achieve the following goals:

- Improve the child sex ratio
- Ensure gender equality and women empowerment
- Prevent gender-biased, sex selective elimination
- Ensure survival and protection of the girl child
- Encourage education and participation of the girl child

Major components of the scheme are:

- A nationwide advocacy campaign to raise awareness regarding India's declining child sex ratio
- Multi-sectoral interventions at district level to boost educational opportunities for girls
- Sukanya Samridhi scheme - incentive to encourage caregivers to set aside funds for female children

### 5.1 Challenges with BBBP

#### 5.1.1 Unbalanced Expenditure

As per a reply by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development since its inception, out of a total of Rs.740.18 crores almost 54 percentage i.e., Rs 401.04 crores has been spent on media advocacy campaigns. While media advocacy is certainly important for the success of the scheme since raising awareness is in fact one of its key components, focus has to be shifted to other components too. Expenditure is also required for education and health related interventions. Further, a certain amount is also required for capacity building and training at a district level. Overall, since the expenditure leans heavily towards just one key component, the success of the scheme will be out of reach. Due to this the expected outcomes won't materialize in the long term.

#### 5.1.2 Inefficient allocation and release of funds

A total of INR 368 crores were allotted to the BBBP plan between 2014–15 and 2017–18, of which INR 291 crores were distributed. It should be emphasized that INR 162.4, or more than half of this total amount—roughly 200 crores—was released in 2017–18 alone, or in just one year.

#### 5.1.3 Underutilisation of funds

A Panel on Empowerment of women disclosed that between 2015-16 and 2019-20, all states and union territories in India had spent only 25.13% of the funds allocated under the BBBP programme. The states have not utilized the funds to their fullest potential and therefore the achievement of the goals prescribed under the scheme is still a distant reality for the country.

#### 5.1.4 Restricted to 100 Districts

The campaign has only been launched in 100 districts in India, therefore its ability to solve the problem of prejudice against females throughout the nation is potentially limited.

### 5.1.5 Insufficient financial assistance

Funding under the campaign is limited. Hence, it is possible that it won't be enough to finance the education of girls from lower-income households.

## 6. Companies that are addressing gender inequality through CSR contribution

### 6.1 Company: Pidilite

Pidilite has undertaken various initiatives to uplift women:

#### 6.1.1 Self-Help Groups

In the financial year 2020-21, 130 Mahila Mandals, also known as self-help groups (SHGs), have been created and developed with Pidilite's assistance in areas like Bhavnagar, Talaja, and Amreli. More than 1,500 more women have joined these SHGs as members. With this, there are now 570 SHGs under Pidilite overall, with an estimated 6,400 members. In order to support the SHG, three more village organizations were founded during the year.

#### 6.1.2 Training centers for SHG women

Pidilite has also come up with Training and Quality Assessment Centres which focuses on developing managerial, financial as well as technical skills of women to equip them with the skills and resources to start and run a business. Pidilite has also entered into a public-private partnership with the Government of Gujarat under the Rurban Mission to develop infrastructure for SHGs to take up livelihood generation activities in villages of Kikariya and Mota Khutavda.

Some SHG units created by Pidilite have started to produce routine products like pickles, khakhra as well as cotton masks in the villages of Khadasali, Manar and Bagdana. During the financial year 2020-21, SHGs backed by Pidilite at Biladi village started producing aloe vera products and sanitisers. In Mahuva, a new logistics warehouse has been started to support these ongoing SHG business initiatives. Further, Pidilite is also offering support in relation to logistics, marketing and procurement to various SHG businesses making different products.

Pidilite also organizes exhibitions for SHGs to help them reach a wider set of markets. For instance, recently in Gujarat, an exhibition was organized for all SHGs located in the area and as well as surrounding states to showcase products made by them on Women's Day on 8th March 2021.

#### 6.1.3 Employee Diversity

As of March 31st, 2021, Pidilite's total employee strength was 6,367. This figure is inclusive of 358 women. It also includes 16 differently abled employees. Pidilite supports diversity and ensures that all employees have access to equal opportunities without regard to their sex, colour, gender, age, religion, disability, or any other characteristic. Their working hours comply with local legislation, and their employees are also paid fairly in accordance with the type and level of work performed.

### 6.2 Company: ITC

The Women's Economic Empowerment Programme of ITC seeks to give these women the chance to generate independent incomes, enhancing their ability to make decisions for their families and communities. Women who live in extreme poverty, are the only wage earners in their families, have no assets, and do not receive regular salaries are given special attention.

Women can start small businesses, engage in self-employment, or band together to create self-help organizations or microenterprises with the right training and financial assistance. Their income and savings enable them to provide better health, nutrition, and education for their children, which is an important investment in the future of their communities. Furthermore, the self-assurance they acquire along the route contributes to eradicating gender disparities and creating a more egalitarian society.

#### 6.2.1 Micro-credit & other Self-help Groups

ITC has formed 1500 operational SHGs throughout the country and is helping these SHGs in overcoming financial inadequacy through microcredit / seed money / loans, etc. The SHGs together leveraged K 5 million from banks during the year.

#### 6.2.2 Women-managed Agri-enterprises

ITC began a programme in 2014 to better the skills and understanding of women farmers in the Munger district. As a project-implementation partner, ITC worked with the Self-Employed Women's Association, a group of underprivileged women who are self-employed and rely on their own labour or small businesses for a living. For technical guidance, ITC collaborates with the Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA). By enabling rural communities to protect, improve, and manage their natural capital through sustainable agricultural methods, the programme, enhancing skills and knowledge of women farmers, seeks to increase agricultural production.

#### 6.2.3 Training for SHG members & other beneficiaries

ITC provides training and financial support to women so that they can explore economic opportunities. They help them in setting up small and micro businesses or in forming self-help groups or sustainable micro-enterprises, with ITC also providing mentoring, entrepreneurial training and seed funding.

#### 6.2.4 Intensive programme for achieving financial self-reliance

ITC is closely aligned to the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) programme of the Government, which aims to provide skills that give employability to women.

## 7. Recommendations for Government to address the issue

### 7.1 Increase representation of women in decision-making positions

Increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels can help to create a more equitable and inclusive society. Women's participation in decision-making helps to ensure that their voices are heard, their needs are met, and their interests are taken into account. It also helps to promote gender equality and reduce discrimination and violence against women. By increasing women's representation in decision-making positions, organizations can create more equitable and effective policies, programs, and services. This, in turn, can lead to greater economic and social progress.

### 7.2 Promote public awareness campaigns to reduce gender stereotypes

Public awareness campaigns are an effective way to reduce gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. Such campaigns can help create a more equitable society by raising awareness and educating the public on the damaging effects of gender stereotypes. They can promote positive messages that counter stereotypes and encourage people to challenge existing gender roles and biases. Such campaigns can also provide support to those who have been affected by gender stereotypes, and help to create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone.

### 7.3 Establish gender-responsive budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is a policy approach that takes into account the differences between men and women in how they are affected by the allocation and use of public resources. This approach looks at how public resources are allocated to identify gender gaps and then works to create policies that address those gaps. GRB is an effective tool for achieving gender equality, as it helps to ensure that public resources are allocated in a way that is equitable and beneficial to both sexes. Additionally, it can help to identify areas where additional resources are needed to address gender disparities and can provide a framework for allocating resources in a way that is more equitable.

### 7.4 Increase access to healthcare services

Access to healthcare services plays a key role in promoting gender equality. It helps reduce disparities in access to healthcare between men and women, which in turn can help reduce inequalities in other areas such as economic opportunities, education, and decision-making power. Greater access to healthcare services can help provide women with the information and resources necessary to make decisions about their own health and well-being.

Additionally, it can help women gain access to resources that can help them take care of their own health and that of their families. Finally, increased access to healthcare services can

help reduce gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination and oppression that disproportionately affect women.

## 8. Recommendations for business and corporates

### 8.1 Develop and implement unconscious bias training to help eliminate gender bias at work

Unconscious bias training at work can help to create a more equitable workplace by promoting gender equality. By educating employees about unconscious biases, such as gender stereotypes, employers can help to create an environment where everyone is treated fairly and with respect, regardless of gender. Unconscious bias training can also help to create a more inclusive workplace culture, as employees may become more aware of the impact of their attitudes and behaviors on others. This can lead to more effective communication and collaboration between colleagues, and help to build an environment that is more conducive to gender equality.

### 8.2 Representation of women in leadership positions

Having more women in leadership positions can help to promote gender equality. Representation of women in leadership positions can show that women are capable of being in these roles and can help to challenge the perception of gender roles in society. Representation can also inspire other women to pursue leadership roles, and provide them with role models to look up to. Research has also found that companies with more gender diverse leadership teams tend to have better financial performance. Finally, having more women in leadership positions can help to foster a more inclusive workplace culture that is more welcoming to all employees of all genders.

### 8.3 Create mentorship programs to help women gain the skills and confidence to succeed in the workplace

Mentorship programs are a great way to support gender equality in the workplace. Through mentorship, women can gain access to the knowledge and experience of more experienced professionals which can provide them with valuable insights and advice on how to navigate the workplace, as well as the confidence to succeed. Mentorship programs can also help to create a more inclusive environment by introducing mentees to more diverse perspectives and building a network of diverse professionals.

Additionally, mentors can help to identify and address any systemic barriers that are preventing women from advancing their career and can provide mentees with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

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