

# 5

## Gender Equality: Achievements, Gaps, Future Challenges and Implementation Framework to be adopted by India

### Introduction

The signing of Millennium Declaration in 2000 meant commitment of the international community to eight Development Goals (the Millennium Development Goals or the MDGs) with time bound targets and measurable indicators. MDG 3 among them committed to “promote gender equality and empower women”. The target for it included to “eliminate gender disparity in Primary and Secondary Education, preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015”. This was operationalised as the ratio of girls to boys enrolment in primary schools, secondary and tertiary education. Three other indicators were added for: (a) female literacy, the ratio of literate females to males among 15-25 years olds, (b) non-agricultural wage employment and share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and (c) political share in seats in national legislatures and proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. This MDG and its targets and indicators have been rightly criticised as overly narrow (Buvinic *et al.*, 2008).

Considerable work has been done by scholars, experts and gender activists to unravel the issues of gender equality and women’s empowerment which has been applied to see the experience, achievement and effect of MDG 3. Gender inequalities are multi-dimensional and the goals of ‘gender equality’ and ‘women’s empowerment’ cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed upon set of priorities. The issue of gender parity and empowerment was clearly stated in MDG3. But the MDGs were in fact

too narrow and hence resulted in the obvious neglect of many other gender specific risks and vulnerabilities, roles and responsibilities, and power relations (Jhamb and Sinha, 2010).

The MDGs failed to explicitly articulate the social, political and economic context in which they were to be implemented at national and other levels. This was compounded by the gender-blindness of other MDG indicators and the invisibility of gender dynamics that cut across the goals in the policy dialogues (Jhamb and Sinha, 2010).

The indicators under Goal 3, namely non-agricultural wage employment and membership of national legislatures called attention to women’s roles as producers and decision makers in the formal economy but even these indicators have been routinely overlooked in the policy framework when seeking to address issues of gender equality and women’s empowerment (UNDP, 2003). Additionally there are also issues about the impact of such share and presence.

Gender parity in education, the share of women in wage employment and the proportion of seats held by women in national legislatures will be significant contributors for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment with each having the potential to bring about positive changes in women’s lives. But there is no seamless correlation between these indicators and gender equality/women’s empowerment. For instance, formal education alone may not automatically

result in gender equality and empowerment. There are gender-specific barriers to school attendance of girls and adolescents besides barriers they share with other groups in general. There is also limited routine use of gender-sensitive indicators. Enrolment does not necessarily reflect consistent attendance or completion or learning outcomes and quality for girls. But indicators to measure progress do not acknowledge the links between gender and quality of education. So while the goal of universal primary education (MDG 2) had been heralded as highly attainable, relative to other MDGs, there were gender-specific barriers to school attendance of girls and adolescents. Similar is the case with indicator 2 (access to paid work) and indicator 3 (political participation). This is also because these targets seek to capture the inputs and not link with outcomes and/or their impacts.

The socially ascribed burdens on women and socio-cultural dynamics limit female education and opportunities. There are institutional and implementation related impediments and also cultural norms and traditions which shape behaviour and stand in the way of attaining education levels and gender equality in ownership and control of resources. Prevailing attitudes and discriminatory laws and institutions act as barriers here.

The issues of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as included in MDG 3 and its targets and indicators and the relatively more comprehensive goal in SDG 5 and its targets and indicators, the still missing relevant crucial factors and gaps, lessons and challenges in the next 15 years are to be discussed against this background. We also take note of the performance of key Development Indicators in general and particularly its Human Development Index, Educational Index, Inequality adjusted Educational Index and Gender Inequality Index during 1999-2014 in different regions of the world and in India (Table 1).

This paper addresses them in Six Parts in which MDG 3 – its targets, achievements, best practices and gaps and SDG 5 and its proposed targets and indicators, implementation framework for the Indian State, financing, technical architecture for monitoring targets, indicators, evidence and lessons emerging from best practices, where possible, are sought to be addressed. This paper is organised as: Section 2 gives achievements under MDG 3 and the identified gaps that still remain. Section 3 discusses designing and adoption of SDGs. Section 4 discusses SDG 5 and targets and proposed indicators while the architecture for development and monitoring of SDGs, particularly SDG 5 is presented in Section 5. Finally, the way ahead and suggestions for action at India level are given in Section 6.

**Table 1: Region-wise Performance on Key Development Indicators (1999-2014)**

Regions	Human Development Index		Educational Index 1999	Inequality adjusted Educational Index 2014	Gender Inequality Index 2014
	In Year 1999	In Year 2014			
Arab States	0.64	0.68	0.62	0.33	0.53
East Asia and the Pacific	0.71	0.71	0.81	0.49	0.32
Europe and Central Asia	0.77	0.74	0.91	0.65	0.30
Latin America and Caribbean	0.76	0.74	0.83	0.52	0.41
South Asia	0.56	0.60	0.54	0.28	0.53
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.46	0.51	0.54	0.28	0.57
World	0.71	0.71	0.74	0.44	0.44
India	0.50	0.60	-	0.29	0.56

Source: Human Development Reports 2001 and 2015, UNDP.

## Achievements under MDG 3 and Gaps

There have been national and international efforts to improve initiatives for gender equality and women's empowerment and their measurement and to identify what is needed to speed up countries' progress towards MDG 3. Buvinic *et al.* (2008) brought together these efforts at the midpoint between Declaration and 2015 and updates them. It is useful to look at this review to see the future action not only for MDGs but now for the SDGs.

The MDG framework tried to address what it considered at the time as the most pressing challenges facing women and girls such as increasing access to education for girls. It even delivered considerable, though not sufficient, progress on its gender-related goals. With the passage of time and benefit of hindsight, it has become clear that the framework did not do justice to the degree, range and complexity of challenges facing women on a daily basis, particularly the most marginalised women who have the least voice and agency.

On the three indicators of gender parity in school and tertiary education, women in non-agricultural wage employment and political participation in seats held by women in national parliament achievements were seen as given in Tables 3 and 4. But gender disparity in education continues and the target of eliminating it by the agreed date was not achieved. The issue of retention in schools and quality of education and levels of learning also arise. Achieving greater gender equality thus remains a long challenge despite the many gains in women's educational and employment outcomes which occurred in recent history.

Key indicators illustrate gender gaps in participation, attainment and performance in education as well as field of study. Thus in developing countries in 2008, 78 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary education vis-à-vis 82 per cent boys. Enrolment rates in primary education are more unequal in many developing regions. On the whole, countries in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa and the Middle East show the poorest performance in terms of gender equality in participation in primary education. A survey of primary school attendance in 108 developing countries showed gender parity was reached in urban areas and among the richest 40 per cent of households,

while girls in poor households and rural areas are more likely to be excluded (UN, 2010).

MDG 2 aimed to achieve universal primary education had Target 5 to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education and indicators were net enrolment ratio in primary education, proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach Grade 5 and literacy rate of 15-24 years olds. Achievement under this goal contribute to Goal 5 when seen with gender disaggregated data. Review of the position in India shows the position as discussed below.

## Achieving Universal Primary Education in India

*The overall increase in enrolment in India:* The overall increase in enrolment in primary education during the period 2000-01 to 2013-14 was 18.6 million. The enrolment in primary education reached the highest level in 2011-12 (137.1 million) and then declined to 134.8 million in 2012-13 and to 132.4 million in 2013-14. Between 2011-12 and 2013-14, the total enrolment in primary education decreased by 4.7 million, with the enrolment of girls and boys decreasing by 2.5 million and 2.2 million, respectively. One of the reasons for the decline in enrolment in primary education is stated to be the declining child population age 0-6 years. The child population in the age group 0-6 years declined by 5.05 million between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India, 2001 and 2011).

The GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in primary education increased from 95.7 per cent in 2000-01 to 116.0 per cent in 2010-11 and then declined to 101.4 per cent in 2013-14. The overall increase in gross enrolment ratio in primary education during the period 2000-01 to 2013-14 was 5.7 per cent (from 95.7 per cent to 101.4 per cent). The GER for boys declined by 4.7 percentage points, while the GER for girls increased by 16.8 percentage points during this period.

It may be noted that Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education indicator is the ratio of the number of children of official school age (as defined by the national education system) who are enrolled in primary school to the total population of children of official school age. Based on the available data, the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education (age

6-10 years) was estimated at 84.5 per cent in 2005-06 (Unified District Information System of Education – U-DISE). The NER increased to 88.08 per cent in 2013-14. The NER was higher for girls (89.26 per cent) than that for boys (87.2 per cent). The MDG India Country Report 2014 had quoted NER as 99.89 for 2010-11, based on DISE Flash Statistics 2011-12. The decline in NER in 2013-14 is attributed to the fact that, while calculating NER 2010-11, the projected 6-10 years child population was taken as 113.9 million in 2010-11 based on 2001 census (as per Office of Registrar General of India estimates) whereas the actual 6-10 years child population as per 2011 census was 130.9 million. Therefore, the GER and NER for 2011 and thereafter declined when calculated, based on actual child population as clarified by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The Age-Specific Enrolment Ratio (ASER)<sup>1</sup> for children of age 6-10 years was 93.11 per cent for the year 2013-14. The ASER was also higher for girls (94.36 per cent) than that for boys (91.97 per cent). But the census data of 2001 and 2011 in India show the continued gender gap in school attendance at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels as can be seen in Table 2. The gap has narrowed at the primary level but much less at higher levels. All these trends reflect the

results of Government's push for enrolment which get reflected in enrolment at the lowest classes of primary level but, perhaps without a similar push and resources for retention and transition to higher classes, shows much less reduction in gender gaps at these levels.

In the two other indicators of political participation and non-agricultural wage employment also the gap has narrowed but continues and hence needs to be addressed (Tables 3 and 4). The number of women members increased from 8.11 per cent in Lok Sabha and 8 per cent in Rajya Sabha to 11.99 per cent and 10.40 per cent, respectively, from 2000 to 2014.

As we see, as per NSSO surveys, at all India level, the share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector was 20.23 per cent in 2004-05 vis-à-vis 16 per cent in 1999-2000. These figures underscore the challenge and the task ahead.

## Designing and Adoption of SDGs

World leaders took a major step forward in agreement for achieving a sustainable future at the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Rio+20 outcome document, "The Future We Want", set a mandate to establish an Open Working Group to develop a set of

**Table 2: Gender Disaggregated Data on Education in India, 2001 and 2011  
(School and Tertiary Education)**

	Year	Males	Females
Percentage of population attending schools (Aged 6-14 yrs.)	2001	74.73	67.13
	2011	82.51	80.70
Percentage of population attending schools (Aged 15-19 yrs.)	2001	42.15	32.18
	2011	51.15	46.82
Percentage of population attending college (Aged 20-24 yrs.)	2001	11.12	5.95
	2011	57.99	59.98

Source: Census 2001 and 2011.

**Table 3: Member of Indian Parliament by Gender, 2000-2014**

	In Year 2000			In year 2014		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Lok Sabha	498 (91.89%)	44 (8.11%)	542 (100%)	477 (88.01%)	65 (11.99%)	542 (100%)
Rajya Sabha	230 (92.00%)	20 (8.00%)	250 (100%)	224 (89.60%)	26 (10.40%)	250 (100%)

Source: Lok Sabha ([www.loksabha.nic.in](http://www.loksabha.nic.in)) and Rajya Sabha ([www.rajyasabha.nic.in](http://www.rajyasabha.nic.in)).

**Table 4: Participation of Women in Wage Employment in the Non-agricultural Sector, 1999-2000 and 2004-05**

(in percentage)

	1999-2000			2004-05		
	Rural	Urban	All India	Rural	Urban	All India
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector	15.09	16.61	16	21.39	19	20.23

*Source:* NSSO.

Sustainable Development Goals. These goals build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge the post-2015 development agenda into one global development agenda with sustainable development at its core. The SDGs share a universal common global vision of progress towards a safe, just and sustainable space for all human beings to thrive on the planet.

A process to agree on a new development agenda beyond 2015 involved two interconnected tracts – a ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ process and a post-2015 development agenda process. The two processes – the political – typically resulting in the goals and the technical – typically resulting in targets and indicators, leading to the formation of frameworks for internationally agreed development goals are different but inter-dependent. UN member states are expected to use the SDGs, universal set of 17 proposed goals, with 169 specific targets and indicators to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years.

## SDG 5: Targets and Proposed Indicators

To initiate the process defining the monitoring framework for the SDGs, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) at its 46th Session in March 2015 stressed that the development of a robust and high quality indicator framework is a technical process which requires time and needs to be conducted in stages, including the possibility of future refinements as knowledge evolves. The national statistical offices need to play the leading role in it to ensure national ownership. The existing regional mechanisms should also be used.

The following architecture for the development and monitoring of a global indicator framework was endorsed by the UNSC at its session in 2015.

- An Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators (IAEG-SDG), comprising 28 representatives of NSOs and, as observers, regional and international organisations. The group was tasked with fully developing a proposal for a global indicator framework in an inclusive and transparent process.
- A High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Post-2015 Monitoring (HLG), comprising 15 to 20 NSO representatives and, as observers, regional and international organisations. The HLG will establish a global partnership for sustainable development data and provide strategic leadership for the SDG implementation process.

The 17 SDGs include SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. SDG 5 is both a cross cutting issue as well as a goal in its own right. Consequently, most of the general targets within SDG 5 overlap with targets in other goals that explicitly mention the gender aspect. But it has not been followed in operationalisation of the goal. Literally none of the six suggested targets under this goal are time bound, and hence not binding at all. Even worse, SDG 5 is the only goal that does not have a single time bound target.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulation has been a more open and more inclusive process than the formulation of the MDGs driven by United Nations Member States, and generating intense and wide debate. And yet, when it comes to gender justice, the goals sound eerily similar. MDG 3 committed to “Promote gender equality and empower women”. SDG 5 calls to “Achieve gender equality and empower

**Table 5: Targets and Indicators**

Targets	Proposed Indicator	Comments
Target: 5.1 end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.	The gender dimension will have to be separately seen even among different groups and communities. These will need to be supplemented by documentation of implementation/impact across geographical areas.
Target: 5.2 eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	Will have to address the problem of non reporting. Need of more inclusive programme support for encouraging them to break silence in this issue.
	5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	
Target: 5.3 eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations.	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	The issue relevant here is child marriage on which legal and social initiatives have been initiated.
	5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age	This has not been a major issue in India but there are recent reports of the practice in some populations and areas and hence the action need.
Target: 5.4 recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location	This is valuable target and indicators may be inadequate and therefore will need to be evolved with further discussion of experience. However the paid and unpaid care have to be separate not combined.
Target: 5.5 ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	Includes welcome addition of sub-national level elected offices. It does not of course take care of how much capacity they will have to stand for gender issues. In party based representation and with use of whips and anti defection law, it will have limitation in effectiveness in pursuing gender related issues.
	5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	

Table 5 continued...

Table 5 continued...

Target: 5.6 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.	5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare	
	5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, information and education	
Target: 5.a undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources in accordance with national laws.	5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	Should be supplemented by per centage of girls who effectively used their rights and did not surrender in favour of parents or siblings.
	5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	
Target: 5.b enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular ICT, to promote women's empowerment.	5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex	
Target: 5.c adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.	5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment.	As under Target 5.5 above.

all women and girls". Two important differences at this level are the explicit inclusion of girls, and of the word "all", which can be used to address the challenges faced by the most marginalised and oppressed. More differences appear at the level of the targets under the goal. Whereas MDG 3 had a single target focussed on education, SDG 5 proposes a range of targets to end discrimination, violence and harmful practices, recognise and value unpaid care work, participation and leadership in decision-making, and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. These are welcome additions. However it is still to be seen how SDG 5 and its proposed targets finally translate into indicators, and whether these will be effective and usable for monitoring, since the experience of MDG 5 is not so encouraging.

Each SDG (as enunciated in the OWG's report) has its attached targets and means of implementation. Those linked to SDG 5 mention legal reforms and technology (5.a, 5.b and 5.c), but there is no reference about funding. It has been noted that the inadequacy of funding was a major weakness in the fulfilment of MDG 3. The challenge of funding SDG 5 seems therefore to be a major stumbling block unless it becomes central to its means of implementation which does not appear to be the case so far.

There are six targets under SDG 5 as we discuss below with total 16 indicators (5+3+2+2+1+3). Besides, three 5a, b and c which reflect means of implementation – legal reforms and technology. Although the focus of SDG 5 is ideal and essential for development, its

operationalisation leaves something to be desired. Many of the targets are of crucial importance (e.g. “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls”). These have long been agreed upon and can easily be captured by appropriate indicators. They are well-suited to have considerable impact, but they do not have a timeframe to make them binding especially for action and reporting. It is noted that of the 17 goals, SDG 5 is the only goal that does not have a single time bound target. So much for the commitments of the national and international community to gender equality and women’s empowerment. The inclusion of time bound targets is indispensable if we want to track the progress of societies regarding such an important goal as the elimination of gender disparities. The targets and proposed indicators are discussed in Table 5 with comments on support, addition or issues of effectiveness.

## The Way Forward

National and International environment has to be more supportive of women’s voice and agency. Promoting the ability of women to articulate their views in a meaningful way (voice) and to become the agents of their own empowerment (agency) is essential in any initiative to help them to overcome engrained socio-cultural conditioning and the gendered division of labour. Empowerment requires a more comprehensive approach. This includes efforts to improve women’s access to resources (e.g. credit, training, inheritance and land rights) and their capacity to use them (e.g. through anti-discrimination and gender-based violence legislation, gender-aware justice systems, and government mechanisms to improve gender equality).

Proactive measures are needed to combat policy evaporation – the dilution of gender equality commitments during policy implementation – and to ensure that a gender lens is used by all sectors. New modalities are also needed to give civil society groups working on gender equality, adequate resources and capacity strengthening support to facilitate their representation in policy dialogues. Innovative approaches are also needed to raise the awareness of the private sector on gender issues.

There is a need of renewed commitment to existing gender related frameworks including the Convention

on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. These spotlight gender-specific issues that were largely invisible in the MDGs, but critical to their achievement and particularly new to the achievement of SDG 5 and other SDGs, such as gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices (e.g. child marriage), and the challenges female youth face in finding decent work. They underscore the accountability of national governments and the international community in putting resources and institutional mechanisms in place to achieve gender-based rights.

The main feature of MDG 3 and now SDG 5 of promoting gender equality and empowering women is that it challenges cultural norms and traditions and requires deep changes in day to day individual behaviour and practices, which are normally regarded as a “private matter”. This is also the main challenge for implementation (Szekely, 2008). Changing the role of women and empowering them modifies household arrangements substantially which in many cases still not regarded as a desirable change for specific family members. Identifying effective public policies for promoting gender equality is particularly difficult in the context of deeply entrenched traditions and cultural patterns. If the laws and mechanisms by which society operates and the underlying cultural patterns are not modified, policy will be swimming against the tide, making it difficult to identify efficient policy interventions to address gender disparities (ibid).

Szekely (2008) has identified three underlying elements which lead to the outcome of gender disparities:

- Cultural norms by which women are relegated to fulfilling certain roles within the household and in society, and through which they are excluded from a variety of activities and opportunities for human development and are reproduced generation after generation and become part of the ‘normal’ operation of societies.
- The rules of society – for instance, legislation (labour) may explicitly exclude women from or limit their access to certain activities.
- The mechanisms through which final outcomes are determined. Even in societies in which



cultural norms provide equal opportunities for women and the ‘rules of the game’ do not explicitly inhibit women’s development, market mechanisms, such as the low returns to specific types of labour, including housework and other activities predominantly performed by women, undermine their development potential.

Progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the development agenda requires support for the women’s movement to activate and energise the agenda. Empowerment requires agency along multiple dimensions. “Women’s organisations... [as] key actors in pushing past distortions and development silos at all levels, and hence crucial to pushing the gender equality agenda forward. The politics of agenda setting influences funding priorities such that financial support for women’s organisations and for substantive women’s empowerment projects is limited” (Sen and Mukherjee, 2014).

In general progress in expanding women’s opportunities has been less than in expanding women’s capabilities. Efforts are needed for women to use their increasing capabilities in the economy and society. Better indicators are needed to measure progress towards gender equality, especially in economic participation.

- Gender equality requires changing underlying social norms in addition to observable outcome. One particularly promising approach to use financial incentives to change the behaviour of families towards girls and women, provided these are adequate and sustained. Conditional cash transfer programmes are one of the most interesting recent developments in demand side programmes to promote better educational and health outcomes – they function by using financial incentives to change the behaviour of families towards girl children and behaviour change often precedes and determines attitudinal or cultural change. But incentives should be adequate and sustained.
- Changes in laws, institutions and policies matter for scaling up gender equality objectives.

- Gender equality and women’s empowerment are not synonymous and therefore cannot be tracked using a single indicator. Equality indicators measure women’s status relatively to men’s status and measures of equality can sometimes indicate equality of deprivation rather than equality of opportunity. Empowerment indicators measure changes in absolute levels of women’s well being. These will include indicators of capabilities (education and health) and of opportunities (employment and political participation).
- The Indian Republic introduced policies and programmes for universalisation of elementary education, enhancing higher level education and also starting with the Constitutional provision of directive principle of State Policy in Article 45, Constitutional Amendment 2002 to make education as a Fundamental Right and enactment of RTE (Right to Education) Act, a number of initiatives were taken as we discuss here.

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, the principal programme of universalisation of primary education, has been implemented, as a centrally sponsored scheme in partnership with States/Union Territories (UTs) since 2000-01. Its overall goals are: (i) all children in school, (ii) bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary and upper primary stages of education, (iii) universal retention, and (iv) elementary education of satisfactory quality. It includes key programmatic thrusts for promoting girls’ education.

In addition to programmatic interventions to promote girls’ education within the mainstream elementary education system, girls’ education is pursued through two special schemes, supported under SSA. These are:

- (i) **The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):** The programme was launched in 2003 and was implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs), addressing the needs of girls who are ‘in’ and ‘out’ of school. Since many girls become vulnerable to leaving school when they are not able to cope with the pace of learning in the class or feel neglected by teachers/peers in class,

the NPEGEL emphasises the responsibility of teachers to recognise such girls and pay special attention to bring them out of their state of vulnerability and prevent them from dropping out. By the end of 2012-13, 41.2 million girls have been covered in 3,353 EBBs in 442 districts, 41,779 Model School Clusters have been established. At the cluster level, one school is developed into a resource hub for schools within the cluster.

**(ii) Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)**

**Scheme:** These are residential upper primary schools for girls from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Muslim communities and are set up in educationally backward blocks where schools are at great distances and are a challenge to the security of girls and often compel them to discontinue their education. The KGBVs reach out to adolescent girls who are unable to go to regular schools, out-of-school girls in the 10+ age group who are unable to complete primary school, and younger girls of migratory populations in difficult areas of scattered populations who do not qualify for primary/upper primary schools. It is implemented in 27 States/UTs. Up to the year 2012-13, 3,609 KGBVs have been sanctioned and 366,500 girls were enrolled in these KGBVs as against the targeted enrolment of 373,000 girls.

**The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan** is a flagship programme of Government of India, launched in March 2009, to enhance access to secondary education and improve its quality. The implementation of the scheme started from 2009-10 to generate human capital and provide sufficient conditions for accelerating growth and development and equity and also quality of life for everyone in India.

**The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)**, revised in 2013, has integrated among others, the Girls Hostel Scheme and National Incentive to Girls, specially to encourage girls in secondary level of education. A sum of Rs.3,000 is deposited in the name of eligible girls as fixed deposit. The girls are entitled to withdraw the sum along with interest thereon on reaching 18 years of age and on passing 10th class examination.

**Mahila Samakhya (MS) Programme:** The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, recognised that the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre-condition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process. The Mahila Samakhya programme was launched in 1988 to pursue the objectives of the National Policy on Education, 1986. It recognised that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment. The main focus of the programmatic interventions under the MS programme has been on developing capacities of poor women to address gender and social barriers to education and for the realisation of women's rights at the family and community levels. The MS programme also involves setting up of Nari Adalats (women's courts) for addressing issues such as violence against women, among others. The evaluation of the MS programme has acknowledged Mahila Samakhya as a unique process-oriented programme which has demonstrated ways of empowering rural poor and marginalised women and thereby enabling their effective participation in the public domain and in educational and learning processes.

**Saakshar Bharat Scheme:** It was launched in 2009 and has been extended upto 31 March 2017. By end of September 2014, 388 districts in 26 States and one in UT were covered. About 3.92 crore learners appeared for biannual basic literacy assessment tests conducted so far. About 2.86 crore learners (including 2.05 crore females), comprising 0.67 crore SCs, 0.36 crore STs and 0.23 crore minorities have successfully passed the assessment tests under basic literacy conducted by National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), upto March 2014. In addition, about 41 lakh learners have taken up the assessment test held in August, 2014 and 1.53 lakh Adult Education Centres are functioning as of now. 2.5 million persons have been mobilised as Voluntary Teachers; 35 million primers in 13 Indian languages and 26 local dialects have been produced and distributed. Around 29 lakh learners have been benefitted under Vocational Training programme through Jan Shikshan Sansthan between 2009 to 2014 out of which the women beneficiaries were 25.02 lakhs.

**Kishori Shakti Yojna and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) – 'SABLA':** The Ministry of Women and Child

Development, Government of India, started in 2000 a scheme called “Kishori Shakti Yojna” (KSY) using the infrastructure of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) seeks to empower adolescent girls, so as to enable them to keep charge of their lives. Thereafter, Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) was initiated as a pilot project in the year 2002-03 in 51 identified districts across the country to address the problem of under-nutrition among adolescent girls. Under the programme, 6 kg of free food grains per beneficiary per month are given to underweight adolescent girls. The two schemes have influenced the lives of Adolescent Girls (AGs) to some extent, but have not shown the desired impact.

**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** It has been launched on 22 January 2015 where the overall goal of the scheme is to celebrate the girl child and enable her education.

In 2005 enrolment in primary and upper primary classes together had a Gender Parity Index of 0.89 in India. In classes I-V it was 0.91 and in classes VI to VIII it was 0.83, this shows a lower gender parity in higher classes. In 2014-15 it was 0.94 for all classes and 0.93 in Classes I-V and 0.95 in Classes VI-VIII which shows a definite improvement (DISE data for 2005 and 2014-15).

The SDG 5 has now reflected the value of care and care giving and women’s assumed special responsibility. The visibility and value of care and care-giving has increased now and care across the life-cycle is recognised as the joint responsibility of society and the state, rather than women alone but it has still to be clearly supported by public policy and programmes. Programmes of cash transfers and targeting cash payments to care givers support women’s empowerment by increasing their control of resources and decisions within the household, but these can also reinforce women’s traditional caring role and underestimate their time constraints.

Few programmes to date have answered the call for ‘transformative’ social protection that would address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, including discrimination and social exclusion, violence and time poverty. There is need of a re-focussed social protection agenda recognising intra-household inequalities, especially, decision-making power

and the ownership of resources, the importance of social reproduction, including unpaid care-giving and household management, the diversity of family arrangements, and the distinct experiences of men and women in the labour market.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is both a cross-cutting issue as well as a goal in its own right. In order to account for the overlap of SDG 5 with the majority of the other SDGs, the suggestion of the UN Secretary-General’s synthesis report that each target should only be considered achieved if it is met for all relevant income and social groups, which includes women, must be followed.

The fulfilment of SDG 5 and achieving the targets under it also mean that the concerned countries meet this commitment by achieving their national goals for women and girls. What they do nationally and sub-nationally is reflected in their monitoring and reporting for SDG. The issue of gender equality and women’s empowerment being a cross cutting objective and requiring inter-sectoral action and initiatives (to address the challenges of traditions, cultures, the practices in private domain) will need a national plan of action with strong mechanism and funding and policy commitment for reforms and transformative approach. Similar plans and commitment are needed at state levels. The programmes particularly for right to education and universalisation of elementary education and support for education of girls, that have shown promise, need to be strictly implemented and monitored at regular intervals. Urban and rural local bodies in which women have 50 per cent claim on membership have to be given central role in supporting women’s leadership at the grass root level upto the national level in order to ensure achievement of the SDG 5 targets. A crucial role will be of civil society organisations working on women issues who must be given role and responsibility as partners. Besides adequate funding which has not been a strong case so far, perseverance of policy direction will be essential.

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Children of a specific single-age/age group, i.e. 6 to 10+ years or 11 to 13+ years, enrolled, irrespective of level of education, as a percentage of the population of the same single/age group.

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