

## EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*For every society, education is the basic need. It is a major factor in the development of persons, societies and countries. Education is also developing knowledge, skills, productivity and empowering the less fortunate. Women are the less fortunate human being in the society and suppressed as well. That's why a framework for promoting sustainable development in all dimensions, the UN SDGs set out in 2015 represent a roadmap to achieve some objectives. Quality education is the vital part of it. Education as a means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change (Bhat, 2015). This paper explores the role of education in promoting the sustainable development of women, focusing on challenges and opportunities. This study is based on secondary data collected from books, Government publications and open-source data base. Descriptive and exploratory methodology has been used for this study.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable Development, SDGs, Quality Education, Women Empowerment.

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### Introduction

According to its definition, "sustainable development" is any form of development that satisfies current demands without abusing or overusing natural resources in order to protect them for future generations. The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of the idea of sustainable development in response to growing concerns about social inequality and environmental degradation brought on by fast industrialization and economic growth. The term "sustainable development" gained popularity in 1987 when the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published the seminal report "Our Common Future," which defined it as development that satisfies present needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to satiate their own. This report highlighted the interconnectedness of economic development, social well-being, and environmental protection, and argued for a more holistic and integrated approach to development. In recent years, sustainable development has increasingly come to include issues of gender equality, human rights, and social justice, alongside environmental concerns. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, represent a framework for global action to promote sustainable development in all its dimensions, including poverty reduction, food security, health, education, energy, water, and biodiversity conservation. Education is regarded as a tremendous force; one which does more than just contribute to the country's development, it also contributes to sustainability. Whether it's social, Economic, Political or the environment, it is a key element of development. United nation General Assembly in its 57th meeting in December 2002, proclaimed 2005-2014 as UN Decades of Education for sustainable development (Dr. Anjana Jadon, 2018). The process of education facilitates the acquisition of the knowledge and abilities needed to accomplish sustainable development (SD). The knowledge of the fact that current development trends are not sustainable is spreading throughout the world, and education and vocational training play a crucial role in bringing the public toward sustainability as our society becomes more interconnected. Among all development objectives, education is acknowledged to offer

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one of the highest long-term returns on investment. A paper titled *Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability* states that "It is widely agreed that education is the most effective means that society possess for confronting the challenges of the future. Education, to be certain, is not the whole answer of every problem. But education, in its broadest sense, must be a vital part of all efforts to imagine and create new relations among people and to foster greater respect for the needs of the environment" (**UNESCO 1998**). Not only is sustainable development necessary for the existence of humanity now, but it is also necessary for its future preservation. A society where everyone has access to high-quality education and is able to acquire the attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyles necessary for both good social change and a sustainable future is the goal of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (**Sharma, 2016**). Given this, the global community should support women's education in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Literature Review

**King and Hill (2010)** advocate that Girl and women themselves, as well as their families and societies in which they reside, reap substantial benefits from the training of females. In developing countries where gender equality in education remains a serious issue, the benefits of investment in people's capital are particularly important for women. National efforts may be less effective without women's education, which is detrimental to the effort of women. Equal educational opportunities for men and women are also of equal importance.

**Adetunde and Akesina (2008)** explain in their study that what are the reasons why some countries succeed Promoting gender parity and the equality of opportunity in education others do not? The answer has often been political will, why Governments are neither willing nor able to change their policies. In order to achieve equal opportunities for girls and priorities as expected in the MDGs, boys and girls. The answer is that policy research should focus on constraints and attention should be paid to primary education. As a basis for the study and practice of Secondary Education, balance achieved in Primary School may be useful.

**Shu'ab and Ayuba (2015)** in his research paper found, the fact that women suffer deprivation in so many areas of life, which has relegated them to the background. With women being educated, they would be empowered socially, politically and economically. Women empowerment will lead to enhancing the nation's educational development, as they will be able to contribute morally, financially and materially to the educational program of the country. Women education will also bring about more children being educated, as they will be able to finance or support their husbands in financing their children's education.

### Research Questions

- Is there any contribution of quality education in sustainable development of women?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in the path of women sustainable development?
- What are the successful initiatives for educating women in sustainable development in India?

### Research Objectives

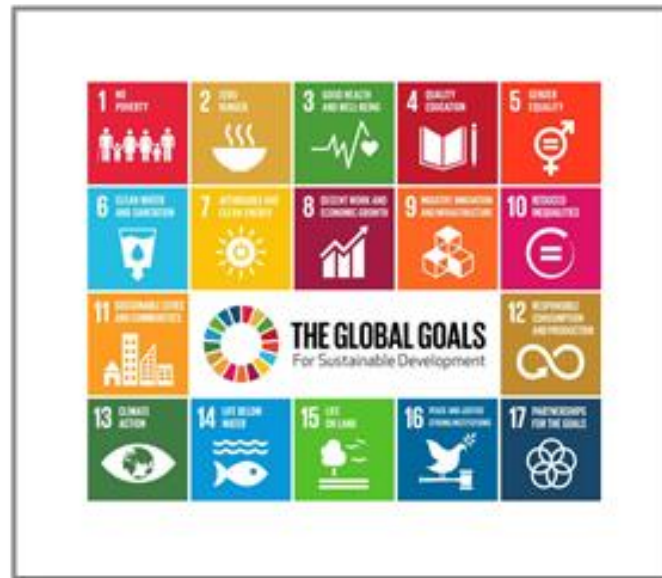
- To know the contribution of Quality Education in sustainable development of women
- To know the challenges and opportunities in the path of women sustainable development
- To study the interrelationship between Quality Education with others SDGS.
- To know the successful initiatives for educating women in sustainable development in India.

### Methodology

This research paper is based on Secondary source of data collection and data collected from books, Government publications, Reports and open- source data base. This research is descriptive and exploratory research.

### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals given by the United Nations' and all of them are interconnected. For example Poverty is therefore a factor of inequality, affecting the quality of infrastructure and its effects on resource utilisation and consumption; which can lead to tensions leading to additional poverty or so on. These seventeen Sustainable Development Goals need to be implemented in the same way that three pillars of Economic Development, Social Inclusion and Environment Sustainability must be complemented and integrated:



**Figure 1: SDGs**

Source: United Nations

- No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Good Health and Well-being
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Affordable and Clean Energy
- Decent work and Sustainable Economic Growth
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Reduce Inequality
- Sustainable cities and Communities
- Responsible Consumption and Production
- Climate Change
- Life below Water
- Life on Land
- Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- Partnerships for the Goal

#### **Aims of SDGs through Female Education**

In order to achieve sustainable development of women through education works across the relevant sectors like education, health, youth, skill development and technology and economic empowerment of women specially aims to the following:

- Ensure that girls and young women benefit from a full cycle of quality education
- Empower girl and young women with relevant knowledge and skills.
- Support girls and young women in their transition into adulthood and the labour market, and to fully participate in the society.

### Education associated with other SDGs

Figure 2, represents the relationship between Quality Education (SDG no. 4) with Poverty Reduction (SDG no. 1), Good Health and Well-being (SDG no. 3), Gender Equality (SDG no. 5) and Reduce Inequality (SDG no. 10). These are massive and also urgent undertakings that are hindered by systemic issues that exist at both the national and global level. Quality education for sustainable development can change the world scenario especially through educating women. The World Bank is adamant that education is an effective tool for reducing poverty. Although gains in education have not been the only reason for India's 20-year decline in the extreme poverty rate, improving basic education has had a major influence on the country's poverty rate (Roy, 2018). Do education and good health generally go hand in hand? An increasing number of studies are exploring the influence of education on health. In comparison with other populations, it has been observed in highly developed countries like the USA that adults with a lower level of education suffer from poor health condition (Zimmerman EB, 2014). Education is deeply associated with Good health and well-being. Adults with higher educational attainment have better health and lifespans compared to their less educated peers (Raghupathi, 2020). Women are the integral part of the society and education for sustainable development help them to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, skills and values necessary to shape a sustainable future (Sharma, 2016). Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. It assists in bringing equality and works as a means to improve their status within family, society and politico-economic system (Saha, 2023). All above said five sustainable Goals are interrelated and complement to each other. Therefore, these goals are playing very crucial role in the sustainable development of women.



**Figure 2: Education and other SDGs**

Source: Researcher Compilation

### Challenges in Educating Women for Sustainable Development

There are number of problems and challenge like gender role of women, discrimination, violence, poverty, illiteracy which affect the sustainable growth of women in the society. In India, levels of girls' and women's enrolment in all levels of education is rising but female infant ratio has simultaneously dropped, with gender-discriminatory views being a force behind sex-selective abortion and gender-discriminatory child-rearing practices (Patel, 2007). Some of the challenges addressed as following:-

- **Cultural and societal norms:** In many parts of the world, women are still expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over education and career. Traditional gender roles and expectations can prevent women from accessing education and pursuing opportunities in sustainable development.
- **Restricted access to education:** Women and girls often face barriers to accessing education, such as lack of schools in their communities, long distances to commute, safety concerns, and financial limitations. This limited access to educational opportunities restricts women's ability to gain knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable development.

- **Gender-based violence and discrimination:** Violence and discrimination against women and girls are prevalent in many societies, hindering their ability to access education. Around 1/3 of women have experienced physical and / or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence by a non-partner, at some point in their lives; and less than 40% of those sought help at any point (**UN Statistics Division, 2015**). Fear of violence, early marriages, and other forms of gender-based discrimination often result in dropout rates among girls and women, further limiting their opportunities for sustainable development.
- **Lack of role models and mentors:** Limited representation of women in leadership positions and STEM fields can discourage female students from pursuing education and careers in sustainable development. Without visible role models and mentors, women may lack the motivation and support needed to overcome challenges and pursue sustainable development initiatives.
- **Unequal distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities:** Women often bear the burden of household and caregiving responsibilities, making it difficult for them to devote time and energy to education and pursuing sustainable development initiatives. This unequal distribution of responsibilities limits women's participation and engagement in education and sustainable development. Women in all regions do at least two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men, and work longer hours than men if paid and unpaid work is combined (**UN Women, 2015**)
- **Limited access to resources and technology:** Women in rural and marginalized communities often lack access to resources and technology necessary for education and sustainable development. A study jointly conducted by Organisation for Women in Science in the Developing World and Women in Global Science and Technology concluded that women remain severely under-represented in engineering, physics and computer science less than 30% in most countries while the numbers of women working in these fields are also declining (**WISAT, 2012**). This digital divide and lack of financial resources hinder women's ability to acquire knowledge, skills, and tools needed to contribute to sustainable development.
- **Lack of targeted policies and investment:** Governments and institutions often fail to prioritize and invest in education for women and girls in sustainable development. Insufficient policies, funding, and infrastructure lead to inadequate resources and support systems, further hindering women's educational opportunities and capacity for sustainable development.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts, including promoting gender equality, enhancing access to education, providing mentorship and role models, implementing targeted policies and investments, and challenging traditional gender roles and discriminatory norms.

#### **Opportunities for Educating Women for Sustainable Development**

- **Empowering women as agents of change:** Women can play a crucial role in driving sustainable development initiatives in their communities. By empowering women with education and skills in sustainable development, they can become agents of change and drive progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals.
- **Addressing gender inequality:** A key issue for implementing the SDGs is how gender intersects with other forms of disadvantage such as poverty, ethnicity or race. Within one country, women or men can have hugely different opportunities; for example, in low income countries, a woman living in a rural area is 38% less likely to give birth with a skilled health professional than her counterpart in the city (**UN Women, 2015**). Educating and empowering women can help address gender inequalities, often a root cause of poverty and unsustainable practices. Providing equal access to education and opportunities for women will help create a more inclusive and equitable society.
- **Increasing innovation and creativity:** Women bring diverse perspectives, unique skills, and innovative ideas to sustainable development initiatives. Educating women for sustainable development will unlock women's potential for solving complex problems in new and creative ways, leading to new innovations and economic growth.
- **Improved health and well-being:** Increasing levels of women's education can have a positive effect on health; for example, a recent study in Ghana revealed a strong association between

the years of education a woman has are strongly associated with her health knowledge, and her use of health services (**E. Greenway et al., 2012**). Educating women can help to improve health outcomes and promote well-being, especially for women and children. Women who receive education have greater access to healthcare, are less likely to have unplanned pregnancies, and have better nutrition and health outcomes.

- **Better environmental stewardship:** Women have a unique connection to the environment and are often responsible for natural resource management in their communities. Educating women in sustainable development can enhance their knowledge and skills to support sustainable practices and improve environmental stewardship.
- **Enhancing economic growth:** Educating women in sustainable development can provide economic opportunities for women, improving their economic status and quality of life. Studies have shown that investing in education for women leads to better economic outcomes for families and communities, such as increased incomes, decreased poverty rates, and improved food security.
- **Building diverse partnerships:** Educating and empowering women can also improve the diversity and inclusivity of sustainable development partnerships at the community, national, and global levels, leading to new partnerships and opportunities for sustainable development.

#### **Successful Initiatives for Educating Women in Sustainable Development in India**

- **Milaap:** Milaap is a Bangalore-based non-profit organization that empowers women through microfinance, education, and skills training programs. Milaap's education program provides women with a range of courses, including business, accounting, and financial management, to help them grow their businesses and increase their income. It also offers literacy classes for women who have never attended school before.
- **Mann Deshi Foundation:** Mann Deshi Foundation is an organization that provides microfinance loans and training programs for women entrepreneurs in rural Maharashtra. The foundation offers a range of training programs, including business management, financial planning, and marketing. It also provides access to technology to help women grow their businesses and increase their income.
- **Educate Girls:** Educate Girls is an organization that focuses on improving girls' education in Rajasthan. The organization works with communities to increase enrolment and retention of girls in schools. It also provides supplementary education to bridge the learning gap for girls who have fallen behind in their studies.
- **Kudumbashree:** Kudumbashree is a poverty reduction mission in Kerala that empowers women by providing them with job opportunities, education, and training. Kudumbashree provides training in various areas, including food processing, handicrafts, and tailoring. It also offers entrepreneurship development programs to help women start their own businesses. According to Kudumbashree Annual Report 2017, nearly 5 million women in Kerala are a part of Kudumbashree, making it the world largest Women Empowerment project.
- **SWaCH:** SWaCH is a waste-picker cooperative in Pune that empowers women by providing them with better working conditions, job security, and social protection. SWaCH provides training to its members in waste management and recycling, as well as skills training in other areas, such as computer literacy, to help women develop their careers and improve their income. The organization also advocates for better working conditions and access to social protection for waste-pickers.

#### **Programs Addressing Specific Challenges and their Outcomes**

Education plays a vital role in sustainable development as it provides knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address specific challenges associated with sustainability. Sustainable development can be achieved through a curriculum that addresses environmental, social, and economic sustainability issues. Educational programs address specific challenges that contribute to sustainable development, such as climate change, pollution, resource depletion, poverty, hunger, and inequality. For example, educational programs can promote sustainable agriculture practices that increase food production, reduce waste and conserve natural resources. Such practices include crop diversification, conservation agriculture, and organic farming. These practices not only increase food production but also improve soil health, ecosystem services, and income for farmers. Educational programs addressing climate change teach students about the causes and effects of climate change and equip them with knowledge and skills

to address these challenges. Such programs encourage students to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours and advocate for sustainable policies and practices. Furthermore, educational programs addressing poverty and inequality aim to provide access to education and training opportunities to marginalized communities. These programs emphasize life skills, vocational training, and entrepreneurial skills that enable individuals to earn a living and contribute to local economies. The outcomes of educational programs addressing specific challenges for sustainable development include increased awareness and understanding of sustainability issues, development of skills and knowledge to address sustainability challenges, improved economic, environmental, and social outcomes, and increased participation by communities in sustainable practices and decision-making.

### Conclusion and Suggestion

In Conclusion, educational programs addressing specific challenges associated with sustainability are crucial for achieving sustainable development. Such programs provide knowledge, skills, and values necessary for addressing environmental, social, and economic sustainability issues, and their outcomes include improved economic, environmental, and social outcomes and increased community participation in sustainable practices and decision-making. But the eradication of gender inequalities and the empowerment of women cannot be achieved through education alone, as it is only one aspect of social policy. To achieve Sustainable Development of women as well as Women Empowerment through education, other factors such as the legal system, social system, government policy, the labour market, welfare systems, culture, and religion must also be taken into consideration, as they play a crucial role in determining the rights and freedoms available to women.

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