



Brief Note - International Conference Closing the Gender Gap: Health, Education and Economic Opportunities

According to the Global Gender Gap (GGG) Report for 2018, which includes 149 countries with available data, not a single country in the world has succeeded in closing the gender gap completely. Globally, there is still a 32 percent gender gap that needs to be closed. Based on the projection of ongoing trends into the future, the GGG Report 2018 notes that it will take nearly 108 years to close the global gender gap. In the past 12 years, 3.6 percent gender gap has been reduced globally. Quite ostensibly, this cannot be considered an impressive progression and gender gap remains a major global challenge. While many countries have made remarkable progression in closing gender gap, countries in regions like South Asia are still lagging behind. In case of India, gender gap has widened in the recent past. The country holds 108th position for its overall gender gap and 147th on the parameter of health and survival rate. India has been experiencing a trend of defeminisation of the workforce since mid-2000s. Several researches have established a strong correlation between women's low economic participation and the poor health and survival rate (Bardhan, 1974; Agnihotri, 1997). The Government of India introduced hundreds of policies in the past two decades to improve women's access to better life and livelihood.

Over the past decade, Bihar has made impressive strides in closing the gap, especially with regard to poverty, health and education, through improved governance and service delivery mechanism; better infrastructure to the last mile. More importantly, the state's visionary and forward-looking approach to address inequality and gender discrimination- through the Cycle Yojana, Kanya Utthan Yojana, campaigns on child marriage and dowry and livelihood promotion - has visibly transformed the gender dynamics of the state.

With 11.3 percent growth rate in 2017-18, Bihar's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was among the highest across states (CRISIL, 2019). As we know that economic growth is always a gendered process and the in-built gender inequalities can hinder the progress towards inclusive growth. Existing evidence suggest that unless we consider the gender dimensions of inclusive growth and policies for inclusive growth address the existing gender gaps, one will always raise concerns over the nature of growth. Instead of questioning the current models of production and initiating steps to correct the distributional bias of growth, policy regimes and frameworks have focused more on measuring equality. With these approaches to inclusive growth, the current policy frames primarily focus on the rate of growth, not its pattern. But the state government of Bihar has made direct interventions to address gender disparity through a number of girl child protection and social and economic security schemes for women. Overall economic growth has not fully translated into equitable and inclusive growth, with Bihar having achieved some but lagging behind in major human and gender development indicators.

Bihar has had a mixed performance in closing gender gaps. While gender gaps in elementary schooling have narrowed, maternal mortality has declined, women and men have the same types of jobs, and child sex ratio has improved; adult women in Bihar remain twice as likely to be illiterate than adult men, and female labour force participation in the state is lowest in the country (World Bank Group, 2016). On NITI Aayog's SDG India Index spanning across 13 SDGs and 62 priority indicators, Bihar has a composite score of 48 over a range of '0' and '100', according it an 'aspirant state' status alongside only two other states – Assam and Uttar Pradesh. One of the imminent gender concerns of the government remains the skewed sex ratio, lower than the national average. The state sex ratio decreased further by one point, from 919 in 2001 to 918 in 2011. Child sex ratio also declined over the decade, from 942 in 2001 to 935 in 2011 (Census 2011). Bihar also reports among the lowest female labour force participation at 6 percent

(Ministry of Statistics and Programme Division, 2018) across the Indian states. The reported crimes against women decreased between 2015 and 2016 in the state in absolute numbers, with Bihar ranking 12 overall nationally based on incidence of crime against women and percentage share (National Crime Records Bureau, 2017). Bihar also has had the highest rate of child marriage, among states, at 43 percent compared to the national average of 27 percent (NFHS 4). Only nine percent members of legislative assemblies in India are women, the highest percentage of women legislators coming from Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan (Masoodi, 2018).

In Bihar, women have 50 percent reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and decision-making bodies at the local governance level; 50 percent reservation in the employment of primary school teachers; 35 percent reservation in all government jobs; and 35 percent reservation in the Bihar Police from the rank of constables to Deputy Superintendent of Police (Department of Social Welfare, Government of Bihar, 2015). There has been an increase in women legislators in the Bihar legislative assembly, most of the women legislators belonging to the Other Backward Caste (OBC) category. Pointing to a deeply gendered intersection of marginalities, studies have argued that persons from well off socio-economic backgrounds survive in politics irrespective of gender and caste (Verma & Yadav, 1996). Within this background, affirmative action for gender equality in governance and political decision-making draws significance for vitiating these intersections. Government of Bihar launched the Women Empowerment Policy in 2015 to ensure that women are able to reach resources and participate in mainstream development; committing that women empowerment was one of the key priorities of the State (Press Trust of India, 2015). In the State's SDG vision document, the priority sectors on women empowerment are aligned to the State Women Empowerment Policy 2015 and include interventions across the social, economic, education, health and nutrition, political and cultural sectors.

To stimulate thoughts on this important issue within the context of Bihar, International Growth Centre of London School of Economics, Asian Development Research Institute in collaboration with Gender Resource Centre (GRC) - Women Development Corporation, Government of Bihar and Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3) is organising a conference on December 6th and 7th 2019 at Hotel Lemon Tree at 10 AM. The inaugural session will be chaired by Shri Sushil Kumar Modi, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Government of Bihar and will be moderated by Dr Pronab Sen, Country Director, International Growth Centre. The objectives of the Conference are: 1. Learn from global evidence of what works to close the gender gap; 2. Deliberate on how social norms mediate women and girls' access to equal opportunities and maintain them at low levels of attainment and outcomes and 3. Provide a platform for exchange of ideas and strategies.