

Strengthening State Effectiveness for Gender-Inclusive Development

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.

For redistributive policies and actions to improve situation, it is important to measure the equality of opportunity for poor and vulnerable groups, but till date it is unclear that such policies by themselves will alter or compensate for distributional outcomes associated with specific patterns of growth. If growth is to be inclusive and gender-equitable, then the pattern of growth must be such that it generates productive employment and decent work for women and men by “equalizing up” – that is, by closing gender gaps as a result of the growing prosperity of women relative to men. This will require policymakers to rethink the role of macro-level policies since these affect the distribution of income, assets and other resources, which in turn have feedback effects on the whole economy. Failure to identify the two-way linkages between the macroeconomy and distribution can undermine efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusive growth. Even as inclusive growth frameworks have acquired currency in development circles, the importance of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment as key development objectives has also come to the forefront of the policy agenda in recent years. With respect to policy priorities, there is a convergence between both perspectives. Implementing policies to promote gender-equitable inclusive growth will require fiscal space. It will require policymakers to rethink the distinction between consumption expenditures and investment, as well as the approach to deficit and debt financing that can create space for spending that is necessary for gender equality.

Plan India’s gender vulnerability index places Bihar at the bottom of 30 states in terms of poverty, protection, education, and health. While gender gaps in elementary schooling have narrowed and maternal mortality has been declining in Bihar, adult women are twice as likely to be illiterate than adult men and the state has the lowest female labour force participation (FLFP) in the country. At the policy level, Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) has emerged as one of the critical global accountability tools to plan, allocate, programme, and monitor adequate resources by governments to fulfil their international, national and local commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE). The 2030 Development Agenda adopted by 193 United Nation’s member states in 2015 includes a comprehensive set of gender-sensitive targets across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5 on GEWE. At the national and state level, India has committed to localising the SDGs to ensure that “no one is left behind”. A key indicator for monitoring SDGs is on GRB: the percentage of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for GEWE. In addition, the 15th Finance Commission of India has the highly important task of devising devolution principles and formulas for vertical and horizontal transfers of the divisible pool of government resources. It is important to note that gender principles are not explicit criteria for either vertical or horizontal transfers. This is an important area which will be addressed in the Conference.

To stimulate thoughts on this important issue, International Growth Centre of the London School of Economics and Asian Development Research Institute, in collaboration with Women Development Corporation, Government of Bihar, is organising a Conference on Friday, August 9, 2019 at Kautilya Hall, Hotel Maurya 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.