



**One Day Multidisciplinary Hybrid (Online/Offline) International Conference On
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
EMERGING TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS
On 12th April, 2025**



**Shri Shivaji Education Society Amravati's
DR. PANJABRAO DESHMUKH COLLEGE OF LAW, Amravati, Maharashtra.**

**Rajasthan Education Society's
ADV. RAMKRISHNAJI RATHI LAW COLLEGE, Washim, Maharashtra.**

**&
SENTINEL SOLICITORS, United Kingdom.**

**Title: Future Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Women and Child Rights for Sustainable
and Inclusive Development: A Study
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Abstract

Protecting women's and children's rights is key to sustainable development, but challenges like violence, exploitation, poor access to services, and global crises still hinder progress. This research paper critically examines the evolving landscape of rights protection for women and children in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It explores the structural barriers hindering progress while also identifying emerging opportunities, including legal reforms, technology-driven advocacy, international cooperation, and grassroots innovations. The study uses a comparative, interdisciplinary approach to identify best practices and propose strategies for empowering women and children, emphasizing a rights-based, intersectional approach to achieve the global vision of "leaving no one behind."

Keywords: Gender Equality, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), cash transfer programs (CCTs), United Nation's International Labour Organization (ILO).

1. Introduction

The global agenda for inclusive and sustainable development places a high priority on advancing the rights of women and children. A number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as gender equality (SDG 5)², high-quality education (SDG 4), improved health and well-being (SDG 3), and decreased inequality

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² Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/node/36060> Accessed on 7/4/2025

(SDG 10), are closely related to these rights. Despite growing legal protections, systemic barriers still hinder the full realization of women's and children's rights. This study explores key global and regional challenges and how laws, civil society, international cooperation, and the SDGs can drive meaningful change.

4. Challenges In Advancing Women And Child Rights Globally And Regionally:

A. Legal Foundations

CEDAW¹ and CRC are key instruments in promoting and protecting rights, while regional frameworks like the African Charter and Istanbul Convention enhance enforcement. Cross-country data on the gender pay gap is patchy, but the most complete source in terms of coverage is the United Nation's International Labour Organization (ILO).²

"A nation's children are its supremely important asset and nation's future lies in their proper development. An investment in children is indeed an investment in future. A healthy and educated child of today is the active and intelligent citizen of tomorrow." - **Rabindra Nath Tagore**³

B. Development and Rights

Gender-sensitive policies not only aim to rectify immediate disparities but also work as foundational tools for achieving sustainable socio-economic and cultural equity over time by creating equitable frameworks⁴. Gender-sensitive policies create a foundation for sustainable justice, with studies from the UNDP and World Bank showing that inclusive development requires addressing both gender inequalities and broader power disparities.⁵ Gender-equitable growth demands public investment in accessible and affordable infrastructure that supports social reproduction for all.⁶

C. Barriers and Structural Challenges

"Gender equality is more than a moral issue; it is a vital economic issue. For the global economy to reach its potential, we need to create conditions in which all women can reach their potential." —

Former IMF Economic Counsellor Maurice Obstfeld, March 23, 2017 (IMF 2017)⁷. Discrimination is one of the most common human rights violations and is prohibited under human rights law⁸. The first two articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights set forth the fundamentals of freedom from

¹ Joseph Shine v. Union of India (2018)

² Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Joe Hasell, & Max Roser, **Economic Inequality by Gender**, (Mar. 2018), <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender> Accessed on 18/11/ 2024.

³ N.K. Chakrabarti, Juvenile Deviations and Protection in the Context of the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986, 25(1-3) *Indian J. Criminology & Crim.* 6, 6-14 (2004).

⁴ "Gender-Sensitive Policy Making", (30 Dec 2024), Available at: <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/gender-sensitive-policy-making#:~:text=Gender%2Dsensitive%20policies%20not%20only,time%20by%20creating%20equitable%20frameworks%20.> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁵ Edited by Diane Elson and Anuradha Seth, "Gender Equality And Inclusive Growth: Economic Policies to Achieve Sustainable Development", (1/30/2019), Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Gender-equality-and-inclusive-growth-en.pdf> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁶ Ibid at 2

⁷ Ata Can Bertay, Ljubica Dordevic, & Can Sever, **Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: Evidence from Industry**, (June 30, 2020), file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/wpiea2020119-print-pdf.pdf Accessed on 18/11/, 2024.

⁸ "Inter-sectionality and Multiple Discrimination", Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/intersectionality-and-multiple-discrimination> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

discrimination¹, equality of rights, and dignity.² People with disabilities face deep marginalization, worsened by poverty and gender, leaving women with disabilities among the most isolated and overlooked.³ Violence against women and girls remains a global epidemic, with women and girls bearing the brunt of insecurity, poverty, and inequality⁴.

Historically, climate change experts have struggled to link gender, social equity, and climate change effectively⁵. Reports show that women and men are affected by climate change differently, contribute to environmental issues uniquely, and have varying abilities to cope with disasters⁶. In India, where rapid environmental changes are taking place, climate change threatens to widen existing gender-based health disparities⁷. Climate change threatens food security in availability, access, use, and stability, while women—who produce up to 80% of food in developing countries—are deeply affected.⁸

Diversity and inclusion are essential tenets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of global objectives designed to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges⁹. Social unrest often stems from policies that deepen inequality or violate economic, social, and cultural rights, such as rising costs, unemployment, and reduced public services¹⁰.

D. Opportunities and Innovations:

The global literacy challenge is still gendered. Globally, 763 million adults and young people, two-thirds of whom are women, still cannot read and write¹¹. Gender disparity in engagement in school and other socioeconomic activities stems from unequal access to basic education, which in turn causes the gender

¹ Air India v. Nargesh Meerza (1981).

² All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1) & everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind (Article 2).

³ Megan Humphrey, "The Inter-sectionality Of Poverty, Disability, And Gender As A Framework To Understand Violence Against Women With Disabilities: A Case Study Of South Africa", (2/1/2019), Available at: https://commons.clarku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1075&context=idce_masters_papers Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁴ "International Women's Day 2024 'Awareness and Action – Poverty, Inequality and Gender Based Violence against Women'", (3/8/24), Available at: <https://belemopara.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/March-8-Edvaw-statement.pdf> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁵ "Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected", (28 FEBRUARY 2022), Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁶ Environment, Climate Change and Women and Children's Right: Challenges Perspectives And The Role of Indigenous People's "", Available at: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11411/files/documents/2023-10/report-6-sept.-conference.pdf> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁷ Cecilia Sorensen , Sujata Saunik , Meena Sehgal ,Anwesha Tewary ,Mini Govindan , Jay Lemery ,John Balbus, "Climate Change and Women's Health: Impacts and Opportunities in India", Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7007102/> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

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¹⁰ "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals in Peace building And Sustaining Peace (2/18/20,)", Available at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/2_ohchr_thematic_paper_on_escrs_and_sdgs.pdf Accessed on 8/4/2025.

¹¹ "Digital technology is key to improve literacy learning for girls and women", (8 March 2023), Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-technology-key-improve-literacy-learning-girls-and-women> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

literacy gap.¹Digital Technology is crucial part of everyone's life². Digital literacy has become a cornerstone for socioeconomic development, offering new avenues for education, employment, and social engagement³.Digital technologies have emerged as an essential tool to achieve this goal.⁴Digital literacy refers to the individual's ability to use digital platforms and resources to find, evaluate, and obtain information⁵.However, attaining equitable development in India is severely hampered by a large gender gap in digital literacy⁶. The “Me Too” movement, which focuses on the experiences of sexual violence survivors, has earned a large response in part because sexual harassment and sexual assault impact people every day⁷. Though #Me Too began in 2006, it gained global traction through the hashtag—highlighting how social media has powerfully raised awareness about violence against women and girls⁸.

Many governments in developing countries, particularly in Latin America, have turned to conditional cash transfer programs (CCT) to address the larger issue of poverty alleviation⁹.However, the lack of a gender perspective has resulted in its proposed conditionality's to cause time-poverty amongst its participating women¹⁰. CCT programs provide cash to poor families, promoting children's health and education while reducing poverty and gender inequality in line with the SDGs.¹¹.

8. Overview Of Constitutional Rights

India's Constitution outlines the framework for governance and reflects the hopes of its people through fundamental rights and duties.¹². Constitutional law grants women equal rights with men, enabling their

¹ Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993), Environmental & Consumer Protection Foundation v. Union of India (2012), Avinash Mehrotra v. Union of India (2009) ,Centre for Child Rights v. Union of India (Ongoing PILs)

² Manpreet Kaur, Jyoti Sharma, “The Role of Digital Literacy to Promote the Gender Equality (October 2023) Shodh Sari-An International Multidisciplinary Journal Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375416942_The_Role_of_Digital_Literacy_to_Promote_the_Gender_Equality Accessed on 7/4/2025.

³ Dr. Bindu Variath , “Digital Literacy Among Women in India: Bridging the Gender Divide”,(8/22/24), Available at: https://ijariie.com/AdminUploadPdf/Digital_Literacy_Among_Women_in_India__Bridging_the_Gender_Divide_ijariie24825.pdf?srsltid=AfmBOOpUBXNvkwsFHnkz8xf4tyYmWiSioRf8tPXtRiYmyjVNzNipmOzc Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁴ Abid Haleem et al., **Understanding the Role of Digital Technologies in Education: A Review**, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666412722000137> (last visited Nov. 18, 2024, 2:20 PM).

⁵ Salima Meherali , Komal Abdul Rahim , Sandra Campbell , Zohra S Lassi , “Does Digital Literacy Empower Adolescent Girls in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review”, Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8716589/> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁶ National Family Health Surveys (NFHS)

⁷ “Understanding the Me Too Movement: A Sexual Harassment Awareness Guide”, (April 25, 2019), Available at: <https://online.maryville.edu/blog/understanding-the-me-too-movement-a-sexual-harassment-awareness-guide/> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁸ “When Technology Helps Promote Human Rights Awareness: The #Me Too Movement”, Available at: <https://www.internetjustsociety.org/when-technology-helps-promote-human-rights-awareness-the-metoo-movement> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

⁹ Lia C H Fernald , Paul J Gertler , Lynnette M Neufeld , “The Importance of Cash in Conditional Cash Transfer Programs for Child Health, Growth and Development: An Analysis of Mexico's Oportunidades Accessed on 7/4/2025.

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¹¹ Kerry Ellen O'Neill, “Conditional Cash Transfer Programs and the Sustainable Development Goals: Problematizing the Empowering Potential of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs”, Published online by Cambridge University Press: (12 November 2024), Available at: <https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/article/conditional-cash-transfer-programs-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-problematizing-the-empowering-potential-of-conditional-cash-transfer-programs/2D9F791CF6E4106FF9659201A7E18B00> Accessed on 7/4/2025.

¹² Aishwarya Agrawal, “Constitutional Provisions for Women in India”, (February 16, 2024), Available at: <https://lawbhoomi.com/constitutional-provisions-for-women-in-india/> Accessed on 8/4/2025.

effective participation in the country's administration¹. Articles 14², 15³, 15(3)⁴, 16⁵, 39(a)⁶, 39(b)⁷, 39(c) and 42⁸ of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard⁹.

9. Child Welfare And Gender Equity's Roles In Accomplishing The 2030 Agenda:

Gender equality lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which asserts gender equality as both a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world¹⁰. The Goals and targets were adapted to stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet¹¹. Eradicating poverty in all its forms is key to sustainable development and essential for promoting peace and freedom worldwide¹². Adopted in 2015, the SDGs are a global call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030.¹³

10. Policy Recommendations:

To address issues like cybercrime and trafficking, laws must be updated and enforced effectively. Gender-sensitive judicial systems should protect dignity and well-being, while women's and children's voices are essential in policy and budgeting. Funding should prioritize maternal health, early childhood care, and girls' education. Digital tools can improve awareness and access to services, and safe online spaces are crucial for learning and protection. Empowering communities, especially women and youth, and promoting inclusive education will drive rights-based development. Collaboration with NGOs, businesses, and global partners is key to achieving SDG 5 and SDG 16.

¹ "Women and the Indian Constitution", Available at: <https://socialwelfare.vikaspedia.in/viewcontent/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/women-development-1/legal-awareness-for-women/women-and-the-indian-constitution?lgn=en> Accessed on 8/4/2025.

² The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

³ (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

⁴ The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children

⁵ Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State

⁶ To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities

⁷ that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub serve the common good;

⁸ The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief

⁹ "Rights and Privileges of Women in India", Available at: https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/cso_social_statices_division/Rights.doc Accessed on 8/4/2025.

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¹² "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development" Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> Accessed on 8/4/2025.

¹³ "What are the Sustainable Development Goals?", Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> Accessed on 8/4/2025.

Conclusion

Inclusive and sustainable development depends on advancing women's and children's rights, yet challenges like violence, child labour, poor access to services, and discrimination persist despite legal and policy progress.¹ Overcoming deep-rooted barriers requires an intersectional, tech-driven, and community-led approach supported by inclusive governance, strong partnerships, and sustained political will to empower and protect women and children.² As it rightly said, *"The seeds of success in every nation on Earth are best planted in women and children"* ---- Joyce Banda³.

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