

# MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITIES IN INDIA: GENDER

Gender inequality in India constitutes one of the major concerns in the current development paradigm. It manifests itself in various forms and is a core determinant of majority of women's lives in the Indian sub-continent. Several research studies and reports by multilateral organisations have shown the existence of the different facets of gender inequality in India. The Global Gender Gap Report, 2013, ranks India at 101 among 136 countries, behind Maldives but ahead of Nepal and Pakistan. The report which used the four parameters for measuring gender inequality, namely, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, educational attainment and political empowerment, put India four notches above its 2012 ranking.

**Table 1: India's Rank in Gender Inequality, 2013**

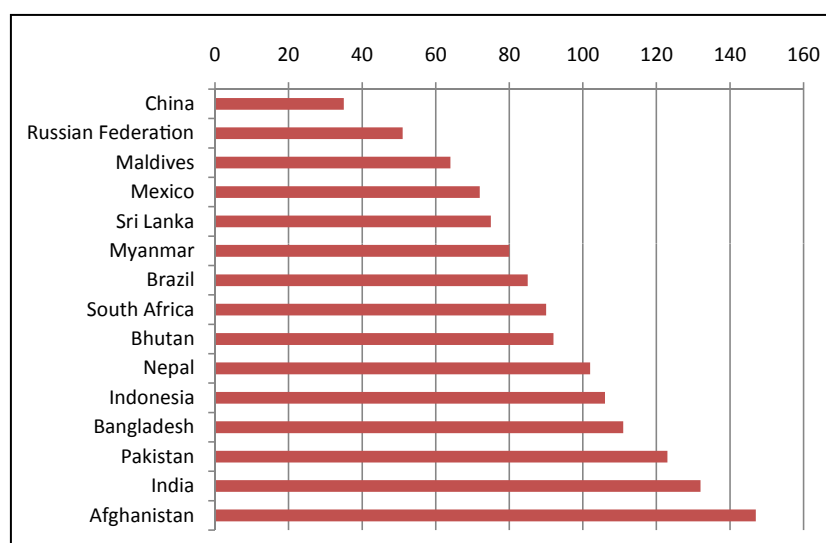
	Rank
Economic Participation and Opportunity	124
Educational Attainment	120
Health and Survival	135
Political Empowerment	9
Overall	<b>101</b>

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report, 2013*

The UNDP Human Development Report, 2013, which calls for better representation of the South in global governance systems, reveals that India's Human Development Index (HDI) adjusted for gender inequality, fares worst among all its South Asian counterparts barely above Afghanistan. India is ranked at 132 out of 187 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII). India also remains the lowest-ranked among its BRICSAM<sup>1</sup> counterparts including Indonesia.

The GII used by the Human Development Report measures the loss in a country's progress and human development because of gender inequality in three sectors: reproductive health, women's empowerment and labour market participation. Table 2 shows the current situation in India in these counts.

<sup>1</sup> BRICSAM is the abbreviation for a set of emerging economies in the global South namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Mexico. Currently Indonesia is also considered a part of the BRICSAM.

**Chart 1: Gender Inequality Index: Rankings for Select Countries, 2012**

Source: Human Development Report, 2013

**Table 2: Gender Inequality Profile of India**

	India 2012
HDI Rank	136
Gender Inequality Index Rank	132
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1,00,000 live births)	178
Adolescent Fertility Rate (in %)	74.7
Seats in National Parliament (% female)	10.9
Population with at least Secondary Education (Female)* (in %)	26.6
Population with at least Secondary Education (Male)* (in %)	50.4
Female Labourforce Participation Rate (in %)	33.1
Male Labourforce Participation Rate (in %)	82.7

Source: Open data portal, HDR, UNDP, \* 2006-10 estimates

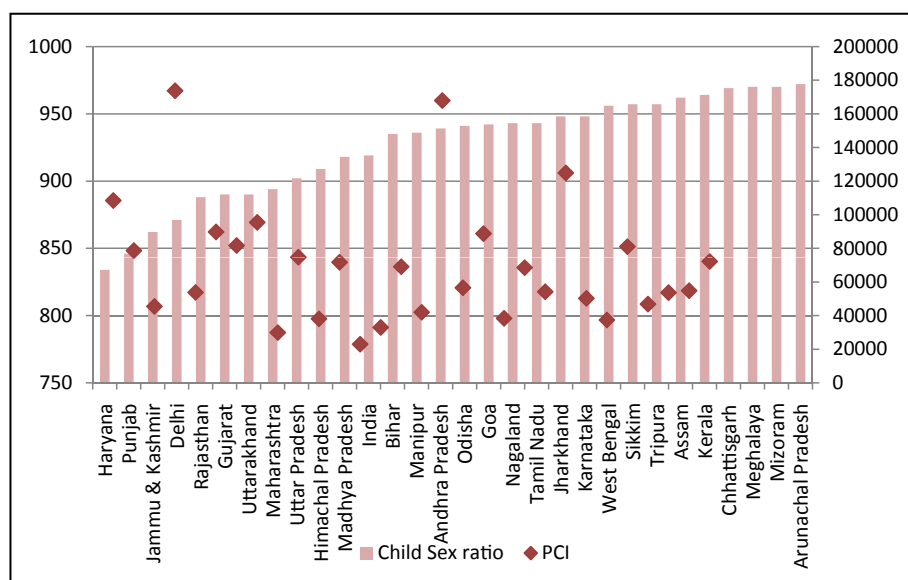
While the GII rightly captures some of the vital indicators of the pervasive gender inequality in India, certain specific dimensions of inequality are highlighted below.

### **SON PREFERENCE AND DECLINING CHILD SEX RATIO**

In India, gender inequalities begin at the stage of conception by a woman. The 'son preference' syndrome in India impacts women's lives significantly even before a girl child is born. The decline in child sex ratio and increases in the incidents of 'sex selective abortion' practised illegally in many parts of the country are evidence of the discrimination faced by women even before they are born. Chart 2 shows the trends in child sex ratio and per capita income in India. While the overall sex ratio in India has remained almost same since 1961, there has been an alarming decline in the child sex ratio, specifically after 1981. This steep decline testifies the government's claims that on an average 100,000 female foetuses are being eliminated illegally in India each year, over the last two decades. Several studies have noted that such practices of sex

selection are rampant in those states which are relatively better off. This is evident from chart 2 below. Such practices stem from the historical, social and cultural inequalities faced by women where a son is perceived as an ‘asset’ and a daughter as a ‘liability’ thereby reinforcing further gender-based inequalities.

**Chart 2: Per Capita Income (in Rs.) and Child Sex Ratio in Indian States**



Source: Compiled from [www.mospi.nic.in](http://www.mospi.nic.in)

### UNEQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

At birth and during her lifetime, the inequalities faced by the girl child in terms of access to education and healthcare are perpetuated by the discriminations arising at the household level. Some of the indicators on education attainments for both boys and girls in India reflect the gender differences prevailing in education. Table 3 provides the gross attendance ratio, which measures the total number of attendees to total population of a particular age group corresponding to the respective levels of education. The gap between male and female literacy levels have narrowed over the years, but the gender gap widens above the level of primary education, thus indicating existence of unequal access to higher education.

**Table 3: Differential Educational Attainments in India**

	Male (%)	Female (%)
Literacy rate*	82.1	65.5
Gross Attendance Ratio in Primary Education	101	98
Gross Attendance Ratio in Middle Education	90	88
Gross Attendance Ratio in Secondary Education	96	85
Gross Attendance Ratio in Higher Education	67	54

Source: *Status of Education and Vocational Training in India, (July 2009-June 2010)*, Report number 551, NSSO, GOI

\*Census data 2011

Similarly, gender inequalities are also directly related to poor health outcomes for women. Studies have found that differential access to healthcare occurs because women are typically accorded a lower status within a household and thus have lower access to healthcare services compared to the male members. While the GII for India includes the Maternal Mortality Rates and the Adolescent Fertility Rates, some of the other indicators of health and nutrition have been provided in Table 4. In the Indian context, unequal access to healthcare facilities and nutrition are evident from the higher child mortality rates and increased incidence of anaemia among women. At the level of households, it is evident from the practice of ‘rationing’ in seeking healthcare services such that every time there is shortage of resources, women are the first ones to forego healthcare, depending on the social strata they belong to.

**Table 4: Differential Health Outcomes in India**

	Male	Female
Life Expectancy at Birth (2011)*	66.4	68.7
Total Fertility Rate (Number of births per woman) (2011)*	-	2.59
Child Mortality Rate (the number of deaths of children aged 1–4 years per 1,000 children reaching age 1 year)	14	23
Percentage of Fully Immunised Children	42	45
Incidence of Anaemia (15-49) (%)	24	56

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-6, India, Key Findings, IIPS, \* Country Statistics, World Health Report, 2013, WHO

### INEQUALITIES IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Apart from access to basic amenities, gender based inequalities in the sphere of livelihoods are manifested in unequal opportunities for women to participate in economic activities and disparities in wages. Table 2 informs on the existing gap between the male and female labourforce participation rates<sup>2</sup>. There also exists a wide gap between the male and female economic participation rates<sup>3</sup> in India. These rates have also been secularly declining for women workers in India (Chart 3).

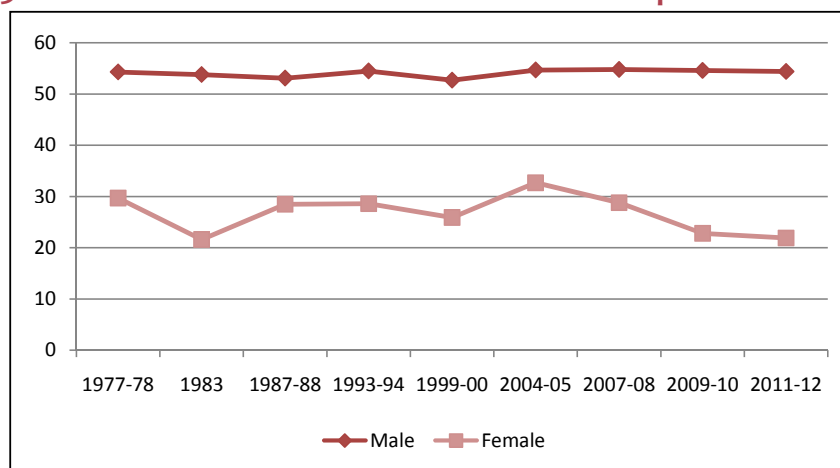
The larger presence of women within the informal sector captures the extent of unequal opportunities for women workers. Currently, almost 94 percent of women workers are engaged in informal activities in the non-agricultural sector (ILOstat, 2013). Also, gender inequalities in the labour market are reflected in the fact that women workers are often found within typical employment contracts with low remunerations and lesser job security (Chart 4). While regular employment provides better job quality, and less wage disparity between male and female workers, casual employment often has greater gender gap in wages. The share of female wages to male wages in regular employment is 74 percent (NSSO, 2013). However, female wages constitute only 61 percent and 69

<sup>2</sup> Female labourforce participation rate is defined as the ratio of employed and unemployed female workers to total female population.

<sup>3</sup> Female economic participation rate is defined as the ratio of employed female workers to total female population.

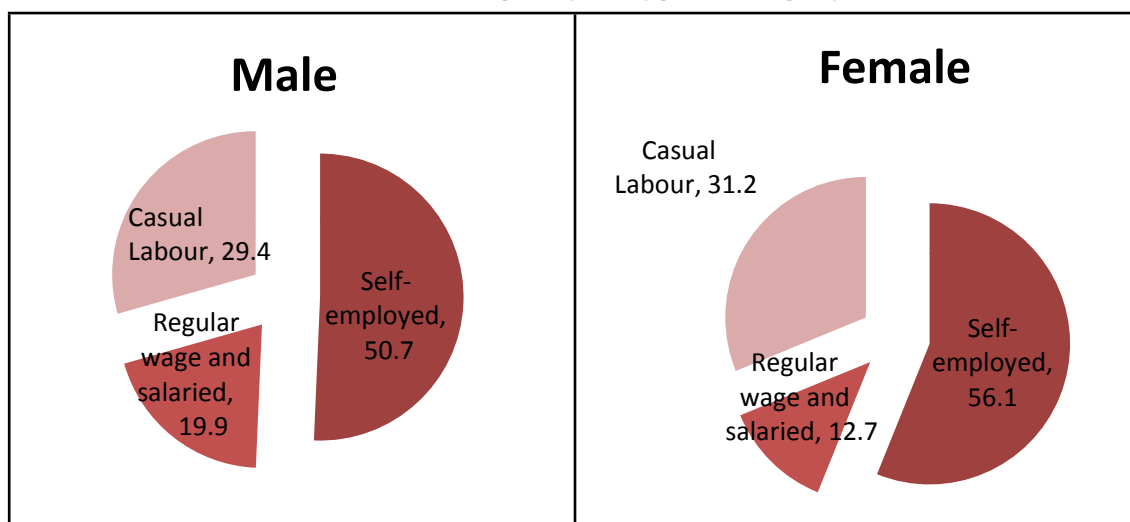
percent of male wages in urban and rural areas respectively for casual employment (NSSO, 2013). Within the self-employed, the largest category of employment for female workers, the payment method is often piece-rated, bereft of any non-wage benefits or fixed hours of work.

**Chart 3: Trends in Male and Female Economic Participation Rates in India**



Source: *Employment and Unemployment in India, NSSO, GOI, various years*

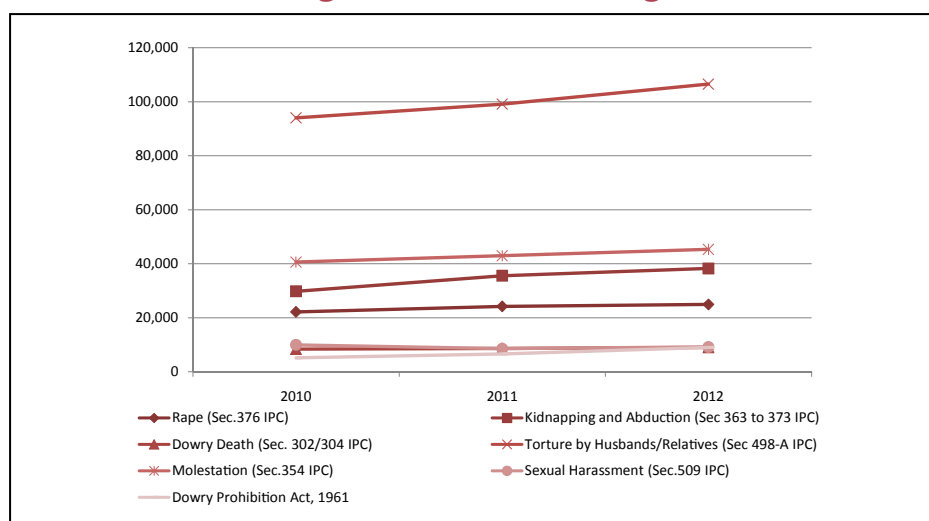
**Chart 4: Gender Disparity in Type of Employment**



Source: *Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment, June 2011-July 2012, 68th Round NSSO, GOI, 2013*

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

In India, violence against women, both sexual and other, forms a root cause that reinforces gender inequalities in social, political and economic spheres. The total crimes against women registered in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that since 2001, it has increased by 70 percent. Within this, the NCRB reports an increase in rape cases by almost 150 percent since 1990 and a tremendous increase in cases of domestic violence. Low levels of reporting of violence against women and even lower levels of convictions as well as lesser avenues of redressal have added to the woes of women (Chart 5).

**Chart 5: Number of Cases Registered under Crime against Women in India, 2012**

Source: Crime in India, 2012, National Crime Records Bureau, GOI

## FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The dimensions of gender inequality highlighted above provide the broad glimpses in this domain. There are several other dimensions of gender inequalities manifested in varied and complex forms, which have not been documented in detail in this technical brief. It is however noteworthy to mention briefly about the initiatives of the government towards financing gender equality in India.

In the domain of public policy in India, initiatives to include 'gender equality' in the discourse began from the pioneering report 'Towards Equality', submitted by the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974. This report initiated and recognised the importance of women's agency, however women continued to be treated as 'beneficiaries' in the planning and policy realms till the Seventh Five Year Plan (FYP) (1987-1992). From the Seventh FYP the development programmes for women had a major objective of raising their economic and social status. The following Eighth FYP had a definite focus on the development of women. Since then the Planning process has successively included 'empowerment' of women in various forms. The current Plan document, the Twelfth FYP, amply recognises the agency of women within an economic system.

Despite this, when the policies and programmes are designed, women are still looked upon as 'beneficiaries'. This has led to the framing of policies which have in several cases been non-responsive to gender-based challenges and in some cases have unwittingly reinforced patriarchal stereotypes. This is not to say that no government programme has been effective in meeting women's needs. But it is also important to draw attention to the fact that efforts at engendering the fiscal policy in order to address the gendered requirements have remained inadequate so far.

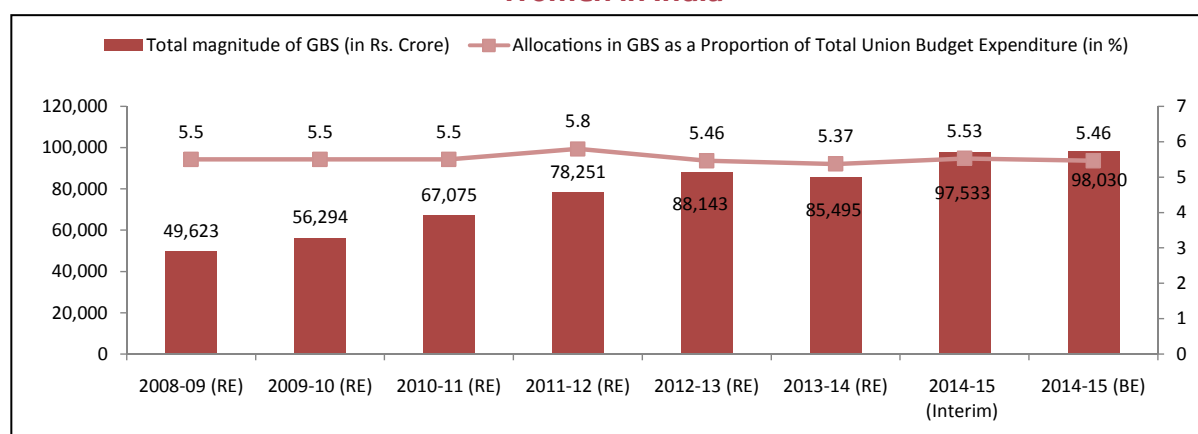
In terms of financing gender equality, it is essential that there exists a discourse on gender responsiveness of government budgets in any country. In India such a discourse

dates back only to the late 1990s. Within half a decade of such efforts getting initiated by the academia and international as well national development organisations, the Union Government of India did adopt Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) as one of its key strategies for economic empowerment of women. However, within less than a decade of adopting GRB in the Union Government and at the level of some state governments, a number of questions have been raised not only on the quality of efforts being carried out under this strategy but also on the potential of the strategy itself to adequately finance for gender equality and empowerment of women. The strategy has been criticised for remaining confined to mainly reporting on allocations in budgets instead of influencing the overall budgetary processes.

The GRB has relied heavily on the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) to provide a quantitative idea of the extent of public provisioning for women in development programmes. While the statement itself is a first step to operationalising the GRB as a strategy, however, it has not yet been institutionalised within the broader fiscal strategies adopted by the policymakers. This is reflected in the stagnant pattern of budgetary allocations made towards the women-specific and women-related programmes in India (Chart 6).

The trends of stagnation in total allocations for women as share of total Public expenditure suggest that in its existing form, the GRB needs to be overhauled for achieving its desired objectives.

**Chart 6: Allocations for Government Schemes Directed at Empowerment of Women in India**



Source: Gender Budget Statement, Union Budget documents, Government of India, Various years

From the above discussion, it is evident that despite India's status of an emerging economy, persistence of gender inequalities in several aspects throws light on the need to address these concerns on an urgent basis. In shaping the policy and advocacy efforts within both international platforms such as the BRICS, G20 and the Post 2015 global development agenda, as well as the national platforms, to work towards ending these inequalities, the civil society assumes a central role. It is therefore important that while framing the policy advocacy messages, there needs to be a comprehensive

understanding on what drives gender inequalities in its varied manifestations. Simultaneously, it is also critical to acknowledge the role of the state in order to tackle the above and other existing forms of gender discriminations through adequate government policies and corresponding public provisioning for the same. The policy advocacy messages both at the global and the local levels need to be reflective of such thoughtfulness.

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