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Essay · Essay

If development is not engendered, it is endangered

स्त्री -पुरुष के समान सरोकारों

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Answer Hint

Gender equality and inclusive development, women’s empowerment, education and healthcare, economic participation, political representation, unpaid care work, gender budgeting, social justice, Sustainable Development Goals, constitutional provisions, barriers to women’s advancement.

Model Answer

Introduction

Development is often measured through economic growth, industrial expansion, infrastructure creation and technological progress. However, these indicators alone cannot capture the true progress of a society. A nation may achieve high economic growth while a substantial section of its population remains excluded from education, employment, healthcare and decision-making. Genuine development must therefore ensure that the opportunities, benefits and responsibilities of progress are shared equitably by women and men.

The statement “If development is not engendered, it is endangered” emphasises that gender equality is not merely a desirable social objective; it is a fundamental condition for sustainable and inclusive development. Here, engendered development means integrating gender perspectives into policies, institutions, resource allocation and decision-making. When women's needs, contributions and aspirations are neglected, development becomes unequal, inefficient and vulnerable to social and economic setbacks.

Understanding Gender-Responsive Development

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Gender-responsive development recognises that women and men may experience policies and economic changes differently because of their social roles, access to resources and institutional opportunities.

For example, the construction of a road may improve connectivity for an entire village, but its benefits for women may remain limited if public transport is unsafe or women lack control over household resources. Similarly, the expansion of schools cannot ensure equal educational outcomes if girls face discrimination, early marriage or disproportionate domestic responsibilities.

Thus, development must go beyond treating everyone identically. It must identify unequal starting conditions and remove the barriers that prevent people from participating fully in social, political and economic life.

The objective is not to privilege one gender at the expense of another, but to create a society in which gender does not determine an individual's opportunities, dignity or freedom.

Why Development Must Be Engendered

1. Gender Equality Is a Matter of Justice and Human Rights

Every individual deserves equal dignity, freedom and opportunity. Discrimination based on gender violates these principles and restricts human potential.

The Constitution of India provides a strong foundation for gender equality. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on specified grounds, and Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment. Article 15(3) permits special provisions for women and children to address their particular needs and disadvantages.

Article 39 directs the state towards securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally and ensuring equal pay for equal work. Article 42 provides for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

These provisions reflect the principle that development cannot be considered complete when half the population faces structural barriers to exercising its rights.

2. Women’s Education Strengthens Human Development

Education is one of the most powerful instruments of women's empowerment. Educated women are better equipped to access employment, understand their rights, make informed decisions and

participate in public affairs.

Girls' education also generates wider social benefits. It can improve health awareness, strengthen educational outcomes across generations and support informed decisions concerning nutrition, family welfare and children's schooling.

However, educational access alone is insufficient. Gender-sensitive curricula, safe transport, adequate sanitation facilities, digital access and opportunities for higher education are essential to ensure that girls can complete their education and convert learning into meaningful opportunities.

A development strategy that neglects girls' education weakens the future capabilities of the entire nation.

3. Economic Growth Requires Women’s Full Participation

Women contribute to agriculture, manufacturing, services, entrepreneurship and household production. Yet their economic contribution is frequently underestimated, particularly when it takes the form of unpaid domestic work and caregiving.

Barriers such as unequal wages, limited access to credit, occupational segregation, unsafe workplaces and inadequate childcare restrict women's participation in the formal economy.

Increasing women's access to productive employment can expand household incomes, strengthen economic security and improve the use of national human resources. Women's entrepreneurship can also create employment, encourage innovation and diversify local economies.

Economic development is therefore endangered when institutional barriers prevent a significant share of the population from contributing according to its capabilities.

4. Unpaid Care Work Must Be Recognised

Women often undertake a disproportionate share of cooking, cleaning, childcare and care for elderly or ill family members. Although essential to social reproduction and economic activity, this work is frequently unpaid and insufficiently recognised.

The unequal distribution of care responsibilities limits women's time for education, paid employment, rest and political participation.

Gender-responsive development requires affordable childcare, accessible healthcare, adequate social protection and the more equitable sharing of

domestic responsibilities. Public investment in water supply, sanitation, clean energy and local infrastructure can also reduce the time spent on unpaid household tasks.

Recognising care work does not diminish the importance of families. It acknowledges that a functioning economy depends on work that conventional economic indicators often fail to capture adequately.

5. Women's Health Is Central to National Progress

Women's health influences educational attainment, workforce participation, family well-being and overall human development.

Maternal healthcare, reproductive health services, nutrition, menstrual hygiene and access to mental-health support are important components of gender-responsive public policy. Neglecting these needs can increase preventable illness and restrict women's ability to participate fully in society.

Gender-sensitive healthcare must also account for the needs of women across different life stages, including adolescence, pregnancy, old age and disability.

A healthy population is an important foundation of productivity and social welfare; development that excludes women's health cannot achieve its full potential.

6. Political Participation Improves Governance

Women's participation in political institutions helps bring a wider range of experiences and concerns into public decision-making. Issues such as drinking water, sanitation, education, public transport, healthcare and violence against women can receive greater attention when women have meaningful representation.

The reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies has expanded their participation in grassroots governance.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 also provides for the reservation of approximately one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, subject to its constitutionally specified implementation process.

Representation alone cannot guarantee effective governance. Women representatives require training, institutional support, financial authority

and freedom from proxy control. Nevertheless, inclusive representation can strengthen democratic legitimacy and improve the responsiveness of public institutions.

7. Gender Equality Strengthens Social Justice

Gender inequality often intersects with caste, class, disability, geographical location and other forms of disadvantage. Rural women, migrant workers, women from marginalised communities and women with disabilities may experience multiple barriers simultaneously.

A uniform development strategy may fail to address these differences. Gender-responsive policies must therefore be sensitive to the diversity of women's experiences.

For example, access to credit may be less effective for a woman who lacks property ownership or control over household income. Similarly, digital education programmes may not reach girls who lack devices, internet access or freedom to use technology.

An inclusive approach recognises these unequal conditions and designs interventions that enable disadvantaged groups to participate meaningfully in development.

Consequences of Development Without Gender Equality

1. Wasted Human Potential

When women are denied opportunities to study, work or lead, society loses valuable knowledge, skills, creativity and productive capacity. Economic progress becomes narrower than it could otherwise be.

2. Persistent Poverty and Inequality

Women's limited access to assets, secure employment and financial services can increase household vulnerability. Economic shocks may disproportionately affect women who lack independent incomes or social protection.

3. Intergenerational Disadvantages

Gender discrimination can affect nutrition, healthcare, education and opportunities for children. When women lack resources and decision-making power, the consequences may extend across generations.

4. Weakened Democratic Institutions

Excluding women from leadership narrows the range of perspectives represented in public decisions. It can also weaken trust in institutions that

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fail to reflect the diversity of the population they govern.

5. Unsustainable Development

Economic policies that disregard unpaid care work, women's safety and unequal access to resources may produce short-term gains while creating long-term social costs.

Consequently, development that excludes gender equality may appear successful in the short term but remain structurally fragile.

Integrating Gender into India’s Development Strategy

1. Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Public expenditure should be assessed in terms of its effects on women and men. Gender budgeting can help identify gaps in access to education, healthcare, livelihoods, infrastructure and social protection.

It should not be confined to programmes exclusively targeting women. Mainstream policies must also be examined to determine whether their benefits are equitably distributed.

2. Strengthening Women’s Economic Independence

Governments and employers should improve access to skill development, credit, markets, property ownership and secure employment. Equal remuneration, safe workplaces and affordable childcare can help women enter and remain in the workforce.

Support for self-help groups, cooperatives and women-led enterprises can further strengthen economic participation, particularly in rural areas.

3. Ensuring Safety and Justice

Gender-based violence and harassment restrict women's mobility, education and employment. Effective implementation of existing laws, sensitive policing, accessible justice and survivor-support services are essential.

Safe public transport, adequate street lighting and gender-sensitive urban planning can also make public spaces more accessible.

4. Transforming Social Norms

Legal reforms alone cannot eliminate discrimination if social attitudes continue to assign unequal roles to women and men.

Schools, families, media organisations and community institutions should promote shared responsibilities, mutual respect and freedom of choice. Men and boys must be engaged as partners in changing harmful

stereotypes.

5. Improving Data and Accountability

Reliable, gender-disaggregated data can reveal inequalities that aggregate indicators conceal. Information on employment, wages, education, health, asset ownership and unpaid care work helps policymakers identify gaps and evaluate outcomes.

Regular monitoring and public accountability can ensure that gender commitments translate into measurable improvements in people's lives.

6. Aligning Development with Global Commitments

Sustainable Development Goal 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Gender equality also contributes to poverty reduction, better health, quality education, decent work and reduced inequalities.

Integrating gender considerations across development programmes therefore advances multiple objectives simultaneously.

Conclusion

The statement “If development is not engendered, it is endangered” captures a fundamental truth about inclusive progress. Development that excludes women's capabilities, ignores unequal social conditions or fails to protect their rights cannot realise the full potential of a nation.

India has established constitutional guarantees, expanded educational opportunities and increased women's participation in governance. However, persistent inequalities in employment, unpaid care work, safety, health and access to resources demonstrate that the process remains incomplete.

The way forward requires more than isolated welfare schemes. Gender equality must inform economic planning, public expenditure, education, healthcare, infrastructure, political representation and institutional accountability. Women must be recognised not merely as beneficiaries of development but as equal participants, decision-makers and leaders.

Ultimately, development becomes sustainable when every individual can contribute to and benefit from social progress. By placing gender equality at the centre of public policy, India can strengthen economic productivity, democratic institutions and social justice. **Development without gender equality is incomplete; development that systematically excludes women places its own future at risk.**

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