



EMPOWERING WOMEN – A PATH TO ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT

The global challenges that take place in the 21st Century disproportionately impact women, an issue reflected in Mizoram's evolving society. Recognizing these underlying issues is vital for shaping a sustainable future, with women's role being pivotal in driving these changes. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) built upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), serve as a global blueprint for comprehensive transformation. Gender Equality provided in Goal 5, is integral to all SDGs, emphasizing women's vital role in areas ranging from health to economic growth and climate action. In this regard, Mizoram has made progress but has been found that there is quite a long way to go to achieve the SDGs. As such, to achieve comprehensive Sustainable Development, redefining the SDGs and women's empowerment at the grassroots level is essential along with collaborative efforts and prioritizing key areas such as to benefit all.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Women, Women Empowerment, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Mizoram.*

Introduction

The myriad of changes and advancement that continuously takes place in the 21st century presents new challenges for development in all aspects around the world in which women are more prone to be worse affected than men. The world's increasing interconnectedness means that factors impacting one region can reverberate across the world, a phenomenon we have

also observed in Mizoram. Thus, these shifts have prompted us to recognize underlying problems that were prevalent in each of our societies, which were considered norms. Identifying and addressing these can have, in ways more than one, a positive impact on a sustainable future. In this context, it is essential to emphasize the significant role women play in achieving a brighter future, considering the various factors that

influence change and development in our society and, by extension, the world.

In a world where information flows seamlessly across borders and global distances seem to shrink, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have gained prominence as a guiding framework for a better future. The SDGs were built upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were intended to have been met by 2015. The SDGs represent a significant enhancement of the earlier 8 MDGs that were in effect from 2000-2015. While the MDGs had the potential to be successfully implemented, they had limitations (Reddy, 2019). They primarily addressed a limited set of issues, predominantly directed toward developed societies, and excluded critical matters such as peace, security, human rights, democracy, and good governance. The turning point came in 2015 when world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at a historic UN Summit. On January 1st, 2016, the SDGs officially came into effect, comprising 17 Goals, 169 Targets, and 304 Indicators. These SDGs constitute a comprehensive and ambitious global agenda aimed at transforming not only local but also global communities. They addressed a wide spread of challenges, encompassing economic, environmental, and political aspects that humanity faces. Importantly, the SDGs adopt a universal approach, emphasizing holistic development. They apply to all 193 member countries, transcending the boundaries of developed and developing nations (United Nations, 2022)

As leaving no one behind is the foundational principle of the SDGs to create a more equitable and sustainable world, the only way to recognize that this vision can come to a reality is by emphasizing the importance of ensuring the participation and involvement of women in the process of development. At the heart of the SDGs lies a profound recognition of the role that women play not only in driving the SDGs to success but also in building a sustainable future for all. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ascertains the centrality of women empowerment as the goals are interconnected and achieving success in one often requires addressing issues that are typically associated with another.

SDGs and Women Empowerment

Women constitute and form large components of human resources and they are important contributors to the development and advancement of cultural, economic, social, and political activities everywhere. In each of the SDGs, although Goal 5 explicitly mentions Gender Equality, the primary importance of women and gender equality is mentioned in each of their associated targets. As SDGs are persistently becoming an integral part of our lives, each goal is in one way or another interconnected to women empowerment. The issue of women empowerment cuts across various SDGs and is not only limited to Goal 5 (Gender Equality). Evidently:

Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) ‘Ensures women’s health and ensuring access to reproductive healthcare services’.

Goal 4 (Quality Education) ‘Ensure equal access to education for girls and women’.

Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) ‘Promotes women’s economic empowerment, including equal access to employment opportunities, and fair wages’.

Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) ‘Highlights the importance of addressing gender-based inequalities and discrimination to reduce inequalities within societies and promote social inclusion’.

Goal 13 (Climate action) ‘Empowering women and involving them in climate action and decision-making processes can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions’.

Accordingly, women have a critical role to play in all the SDGs, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is vital for the successful implementation of the entire SDG agenda. Women inherently have the right to equality across all domains, a principle that must be upheld through legislation and legal procedures, including proactive steps like quotas. Given that all areas of life relate to gender equality, steps to eliminate gender discrimination should be increased wherever they appear.

SDGS and Women in Mizoram

The empowerment of women in recent times has become the most important talked about topic and hotly debated issue all over the world. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, India ranked low at 127th place out of 146 countries in terms of gender

parity (World Economic Forum, 2023). Women’s discrimination is still quite high in India and more visible compared to other countries which provides a necessity to respond and empower women. As a country, India has a long way ahead to mediate the condition of women. The conversation of women in India has always been negative and the condition of women in our country as a whole is far from being perfect which makes the proper implementation and facilitating of the SDGs very essential.

Mizoram being a traditionally patriarchal society, women have always been subservient to males and their status has always been that of a marginalized one. The condition of women and their status in Mizoram has often been regarded in recent times as remarkable as compared to other states in India (Lalhmingpuii & Namchoom, 2014). The reason behind this is that historically, the status of women has been quite low, as women gradually gain empowerment through education and other means, there is a perception that the situation of women has greatly improved. However, when we examine the true status and roles of women more closely, the assertion that women in Mizoram are doing exceptionally well becomes highly questionable. Therefore, the challenges faced by women are still significantly pervasive in Mizoram. To combat and minimize the negative ties between women and our society, Mizoram like any other state and country has taken up several initiatives and policies to empower women in all areas of development. The most universal one is the SDGs where the state’s objectives and universal goal are integrated.

In India, the NITI Aayog in collaboration with Union Ministries and States/Union Territories developed the SDG Index which is a vital advocacy tool to track and assess the commitment of SDGs in each State and Union Territory. The First Edition of the SDGs India Index was published in 2018, with 62 indicators drawn from 39 targets across 13 SDGs: Goals 12, 13, 14, and 17 were excluded due to a lack of indicators for which State-specific data was available. The second edition of the Index of 2019 – 20, covered all 17 Goals and 54 targets with 100 indicators. The third and current edition 2020 – 21 edition by covers more targets. The Index provides insights into the country’s States and Union Territories’ social, economic, and environmental standing as they work to achieve SDGs. The Index has been designed to be accessible to all stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society, businesses, and the general public. The performance of the states/union territories is measured by different indicators and is given a score out of a score of 100 in which according to their score their categories have been devised- the first being the aspirant (0 – 49), performer (50– 64), frontrunner (65-99) and achiever (100). According to the latest Index, Mizoram has a promising future in attaining the SDGs, on Goal 5- Gender Equality, Mizoram has attained a score of only 54 out of 100 in the performance indicator, which is significantly lower than the gender equality perception of the state (NITI Aayog SDG India Index Report. 2018, 2019-20, 2020-2021).

Table 1: Niti Aayog’s SDG Index (2020-21) Mizoram Performance

SDGs	Mizoram’s Score*
SDG 1 (No Poverty)	80
SDG 2(Zero Hunger)	72
SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-Being)	79
SDG 4 (Quality Education)	60
SDG 5 (Gener Equality)	54
SDG 6(Clean Water & Sanitation)	85
SDG 7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	100
SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	51
SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation And Infrastructure)	31
SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	64
SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	61
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	87
SDG 13 (Climate Action)	66
SDG 4 (Life Below Water)	N/A
SDG 15 (Life On Land)	48
SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions)	81
SDG 17 (Partnerships For The Goals)	N/A

*Note: *The score is out of 100.*

Source: NITI Aayog’s SDG index 2020-21. Retrieved on 27th August 2023 from <https://sdgindiaindex.niti.gov.in>.

Additionally, the North- East Region District SDG Index is a region-specific tool aimed at assessing and promoting the SDGs in the northeast part of India which provides detailed district-wise performance and not state-wise performance. In this index, the -

Table 2: Overall Performance of Districts in Mizoram in NER SDG Districts Index (2021 – 22)

District	Overall Rank within the Districts of NER [#]	Rank within the State of Mizoram	Overall Performance Score within the Districts of the NER
Serchhip	5	1	74.87
Lunglei	8	2	72.87
Kolasib	12	3	72.27
Champhai	15	4	71.93
Mamit	19	5	71.47
Aizawl	20	6	71.27
Saiha	39	7	68.27
Lawngtlai	79	8	63.40
Hnahthial	N/A	N/A	N/A
Khawzawl	N/A	N/A	N/A
Saitual	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: [#]NER means North Eastern Region; N/A means that the 3 districts are newly created and lack data to measure their performance.

Source: Retrieved on 27th August 2023 from https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021-08/NER_SDG_Index_NITI_26082021.pdf

Table 3: NER District SDG Index (2021 - 22) SDG 5 Gender Equality Performance of the Districts in Mizoram Out of all the Districts in NER

Districts	Overall Rank within the NER [#]	Score (Out of 100)
Lunglei	81	58
Kolasib	83	57
Champhai	86	56
Lawngtlai	95	50
Mamit	95	50
Serchhip	95	50
Saiha	100	47
Aizawl	103	36

Note: [#]NER means North Eastern Region.

Source: Retrieved on 27th August 2023 from https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021-08/NER_SDG_Index_NITI_26082021.pdf

performance of the different districts of Mizoram, excluding Hnahthial, Saitual, and Khawzawl, is also assessed. The reason for the exclusion of these districts is due to the lack of information and data as they are newly created districts (Sadashivam & Tabassum, 2022).

Therefore, the provided table offers a clear overview of each district's performance. It is evident that within the various districts of north-east India, those in Mizoram have demonstrated exceptional progress. However, when we conduct a comparative assessment of each specific goal, it becomes apparent that SDG 5 lags behind, indicating the need for improvement across all districts in Mizoram. It is crucial to emphasize that success in just a few goals cannot guarantee overall success. To truly fulfil the overarching purpose of the SDGs, every goal must harmonize with the others. Consequently, women's active involvement in pursuing the SDGs is of utmost importance to achieve the ultimate goals of the SDG agenda.

Conclusion

Although the indices indicate that the status of women in Mizoram may not be as positive as commonly believed, it is important to recognize that Mizoram possesses significant opportunities for improvement in this regard. It is undeniable that the advantages of SDGs and women empowerment are closely intertwined, offering numerous opportunities for Mizoram to progress.

In this pursuit, Mizoram's Planning and Programme Implementation Department

serves as the key agency responsible for SDG implementation, collaborating with several other departments pertaining to women's development. To strengthen women's active participation in advancing the SDGs, it is imperative to foster gender-responsive governance and policies. Furthermore, increasing women's involvement in decision-making processes across politics, religious institutions, and NGOs is essential as they are the main drivers and components of governance in Mizoram. Establishing a robust data collection and monitoring unit can also prove highly beneficial in this endeavour.

Lastly, the pivotal factor in realizing SDGs and women empowerment is the need to emphasize, educate, and disseminate the true essence of SDGs. Often misconceived as a concern solely for developed nations, focused only on environmental issues, SDGs must be comprehensively redefined and communicated at the grassroots level of all sections of society to ensure that the foundation for comprehensive sustainable development is established, backed by local-level information and data. Therefore, by collaborating and prioritizing key areas such as empowering women, we can collectively forge a sustainable future that benefits everyone.

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