

Restoration of Women's Rights through G20 India: Exploring the Dynamics of Education and Female Labour Participation

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Introduction

The G20 developed in the aftermath of the financial crisis has been an instrumental player in broadening dialogue and strengthening institutional framework in member states. Originally from a limited agenda of economic cooperation and financial growth, its agenda has now expanded to cover areas like climate change. Gender disparity and women led development is an important area which G20 has consistently focused on since 2012 and which is receiving widespread attention under the Indian Presidency. Gender led disparity under the G20 Agenda has generally focused upon employment and women's participation in the labour force and female driven entrepreneurship to more sustainable and long-term growth of women in the labour market. In pursuance of this goal, the G20 have also launched platforms and initiatives for uplifting women and promoting their empowerment such as the W20 and G20 EMPOWER. The agenda becomes important, in the context of recent times, where data shows that women's economic involvement in some countries have been stagnating and in countries like India, it has dropped.¹ In

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¹Growth in female labour force participation in India now seems to be stagnating, The Wire (2023), <https://thewire.in/women/women-labour-force-india-growth> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

comparison to male labour force which saw a 2.4% reduction in their labor force participation rate between 2019 and 2020, women saw a 3.4% decline.² The IMF report of 2022 has shown that not only women's participation was dipping, but substantive inequality was also existent in the labour market.³ This decline has been further exacerbated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in severe unemployment rates throughout the world. Studies show that women are more likely to face unemployment than men, especially in light of such a pandemic that widens the gender gap in labour force participation. Moreover, a small percentage of the women participating in the labour market are employed.⁴ Although, a large number of factors can be identified for low participation of women, such as deep rooted patriarchal tendencies to exclude women, inequitable pay, focus on domestic responsibilities, inadequate provisions for maternity care, this paper concentrates on one of the core aspects of exclusion as well as overall gender led development- education and literacy, the effects of which has been explored in the G20 agenda of 2023.⁵ Education has been hailed to be a *Game Changing Pathway for Women Empowerment* at the G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment.⁶ At the G20 level, education, as an issue itself, has been given due coverage.⁷ Successive meetings under the Indian Presidency have focused on education particularly increasing female

² Global Gender Gap Report 2023, World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/gender-gaps-in-the-workforce/> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

³ *Id*

⁴ *Id*

⁵ Madhusree Banerjee, Gender Equality and Labour Force Participation: Mind the Gap, 4 ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change 113 (2019)

⁶ G20 Ministerial Conference of WCD Ministry on Women's Empowerment inaugurated in Gandhinagar today, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1945250> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁷ G20 Education Ministers' Declaration 2018, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-09-05-education.html> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

students participation in STEM areas and digital literacy.⁸ According to information from the G20 EMPOWER group, 49% of member nations had gender parity in elementary education. At the secondary level, the disparity gets wider. In lower secondary education, 42% of member nations and 24% of member countries have achieved gender parity. Due to a paucity of STEM skills, capabilities, access and awareness, 11% of female employees face a larger risk of losing their employment to automation as compared to 9% amongst men.⁹

This focus on education becomes more pertinent in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, since a large share of women working in informal sectors became unemployed and the pandemic has exposed the fault lines that already underlie the institutional frameworks regarding female labour market participation. Repeated studies have shown that limited access to basic educational frameworks along with lack of higher educational opportunities to sustain women in the labour market has been a huge impediment to women empowerment and participation in the workforce.¹⁰ Hence education becomes particularly important here, since it has the capacity to sustain women in the labour market in the long term.

The paper begins with an assessment of G20 and women led development particularly on how female labour force participation has always been a focus area of G20. The next section explores the role of education in facilitating female labour force participation. The paper will then focus on the international legal frameworks as well as efforts by G20 countries in ensuring

⁸ *Supra note 6*

⁹ G20 EMPOWER group. <https://g20empower-india.org/en/home/focus-area-details/WomenEducation>

¹⁰ Gendered Experiences of COVID-19: Women, Labour, and Informal Sector, (2021), <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/gendered-experiences-covid-19-women-labour-and> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

educational opportunities followed by the measures undertaken by G20 countries to ensure educational access. Finally, India's stance on this issue followed by the policies and legal framework has been analysed. Emphasis has been given particularly on India's commitments on the role of education in light of the G20 agenda. The paper argues that education, when being focused on the agenda of G20 as catalyst for female labour force participation, has the potential to reduce vulnerabilities in the labour market and create sustainable growth for women in the labour market.

Discourses of G20 on Gender Development and Education

In order to proceed upon the key themes of G20 2023, it becomes pertinent to understand the overall agenda of gender justice in G20. The G20 while originally concentrating on hard financial and economic crises has marked a shift in its approach to taking up issues like global unemployment and gender disparity in the workplace.¹¹ Gender inequality received focus for the first time in the G20 platform, in the Los Cabos Summit in 2012, by member states. From identifying low social and economic participation as a major impediment to gender development in Los Cabos,¹² the discourse under the G20 has gradually shifted towards reduction of female participation in the labour market and long term sustainable growth.¹³ The agenda received concretisation under the Australian Presidency in 2014, where the slogan '25 by 25' was adopted in Brisbane to obtain sustainable, consistent growth for female labour force participation.¹⁴ The Brisbane Action Plan set a goal for

¹¹ Daniel Neff & Joachim Betz, *Gender Justice as an International Objective: India in the G20*, 12 (2017) p. 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24793>.

¹² G20 leaders Declaration Final V2 - OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/g20/summits/los-cabos/2012-0619-loscabos.pdf> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

¹³ *Supra* note 11

¹⁴ *Supra* note 12

reducing the gender pay gap by 25% till 2025 thereby bringing in more than 100 million women into the labour force.¹⁵ This discourse fructified into political commitments in the Antalya Summit in 2015 where the obligation to document participation rates by women became more binding upon members. Women and youth were identified as vulnerable groups susceptible to informal employment and low pay. The ‘G20 Framework for Promoting Quality Jobs’ was created to address this issue by promoting quality of pay, lowering labor market insecurity, and promoting favorable working conditions.¹⁶

The Antalya Summit is also very significant, since one of the most important gender-based initiatives of the G20 was launching the Women-20 Outreach Group (W20).¹⁷ The W20 is a network of transnational organizations, policy-based think tanks and entrepreneur associations aiming to promote women’s economic empowerment. Its agenda has focused on tax revenue assessments, budget planning, preparing a national action plan for Brisbane goal with the assistance of ILO & OECD, promotion of female entrepreneurs and women’s cooperatives. Issues related to providing special digital support, education for women and girls and economic ownership have also been discussed as part of the W20 agenda.¹⁸ The W20 has also repeatedly affirmed the Brisbane goal and has voiced for promotion of equal share of paid work, providing support for finance, credit and technical knowhow for promoting female entrepreneurship.¹⁹ Greater focus was placed on women's engagement in G20

¹⁵ 2014 Brisbane Summit Communiqué, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2014/2014-1116-communicue.html> (last visited Aug 24, 2023).

¹⁶ ANTALYA ACTION PLAN (2015), <https://www.oecd.org/g20/summits/antalya/Antalya-Action-Plan.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Id*

¹⁸ *Supra note 11*

¹⁹ W20 Summit Communiqué (2015), <http://g20.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/W20-Summit-Final-Communiqu--.pdf>.

member states during the first W20 meeting in Istanbul to increase their economic capabilities.²⁰ Till date, the W20 has focused on economic empowerment of women, financial inclusion of women, educational policies and skill development for women²¹.

Furthermore, to promote women's entrepreneurship the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative was announced in the G20 summit held at Germany in 2017 to boost women entrepreneurship and women driven SMEs by addressing concerns such as finance, credit, savings, legal policy etc. related to ownership paving the way for women entrepreneurs.²² Apart from this, the G20 Alliance for Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation also known as G20 EMPOWER was launched during the Osaka Summit in 2019. EMPOWER was established to promote women leadership in the private sector through its alliance with corporate leaders and governments in member countries.²³

A study of the G20 Agenda on women led development shows that there has been a gradual shift throughout the years, from concentrating only on improving working conditions for women and expanding female labor force participation towards more diverse issues such as reducing unpaid work, sustainability of the female labour force and focus on education policies. Since the establishment of W20 in 2015, the G20 has placed a strong emphasis on supporting female entrepreneurs and boosting the representation

²⁰ *Id*

²¹ B20-W20-Y20 Statement, (2018), http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/b20/B20-W20-Y20-2018_Statement_on_Education.pdf.

²² Beena Pandey, Moving Ahead for Women Empowerment in G20 (2023), https://ris.org.in/newsletter/RIS%20Latest%20Publications/2020/April/G20%20Digest/G20%20Digest%20March-may%202020_vol_1_No_5/pdf/Beena%20Pandey.pdf.

²³ G20 alliance for empowerment and progression of women's economic representation, <https://g20empower-india.org/en#:~:text=G20%20EMPOWER%20endeavours%20to%20be,and%20empowerment%20across%20G20%20countries.> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

of women in the STEM fields. The G20 sought to address gender disparity by placing women at the center of recovery efforts in 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a disproportionately negative impact on women.²⁴ The G20 pledged to increase investments in affordable, high-quality healthcare facilities, digital technology, and MSME infrastructure in 2022.²⁵

Continuing on that path, G20 in 2023 under the present Indian presidency has emphasized on gender equality and ‘women-led development’. The three focus areas under India’s presidency are: (i) Women’s Entrepreneurship: A win-win for Equity and Economy; (ii) Partnership for promoting women leadership at all levels, including at the grassroots and (iii) Education, the key to women’s empowerment and equal workforce participation.²⁶ Education, particularly, has featured repeatedly in G20’s theme. In 2018, the W20, Y20 and B20 published a report where education was recognised as a key enabler in women’s empowerment particularly since basic issues such as literacy and numeracy are deficient. Strategies at promoting quality education was recognised as a key factor in economic empowerment of women.²⁷ Hence it is no surprise that education has once again featured on India’s agenda for G20.

²⁴ Press release: UN Women and Women 20 call on G20 members to recognize women as drivers of economic recovery and resilience during COVID-19 and beyond, UN Women – Headquarters (2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/press-release-un-women-and-w20-call-to-recognize-women-as-drivers-of-recovery-and-resilience> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

²⁵ The White House, G20 Bali Leaders’ Declaration, The White House (2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/16/g20-bali-leaders-declaration/> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

²⁶ *Supra* note 6

²⁷ *Supra* note 21

Moreover, education, as an issue, has always been a focus area in the G20's agenda.²⁸ An education working group was established in 2018 under Argentina's Presidency. In the 2023 summit, education and its relationship with female labour participation has received a renewed focus with an array of measures promised by the Indian Presidency such as digital inclusion, focusing women enrolment and participation in STEM.²⁹ The W20 Communique in 2023 heavily focused on the role of education as a priority. Recognising education as a human right the Communique emphasizes its importance in labour market participation.³⁰

In light of the strong focus of G20 on education and women empowerment, it becomes pertinent to examine the role of education and its relationship with female labour participation. The next section assesses the role of education in employability and sustenance in the labour market, particularly focusing on female labour.

Exploring the Dynamics between Education and Sustained Employability of Women

In 2023, the first ever General Survey on Achieving Gender Equality at Work released by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) examined issues related to gender discrimination, maternity care and protection and challenges faced by

²⁸ UNESCO presents outcome documents at G20 Education Ministers meeting in India | UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-presents-outcome-documents-g20-education-ministers-meeting-india> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseSelfframePage.aspx?PRID=1945250#:~:text=Through%20the%20course%20of%20India's,private%20sector%2C%20and%20W20%2C%20an>

²⁹ *Supra* note 6.

³⁰ W20 Communique (2023), <https://w20india.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/W20-Communique-2023.pdf>

workers with family responsibilities.³¹ Unpaid care and family work has been identified as one of the prime concentrations of female labour.³² According to general data on gender inequality, the gender difference for time spent providing unpaid care won't disappear until 2228.³³ Since neither unpaid care nor family work provide dividends, women are more likely to remain in vulnerable forms of employment or be unemployed.³⁴ This corresponds with ILO data, which demonstrates that women are less likely than men to participate in the labor market and have a higher possibility of being unemployed globally.³⁵ In addition, unhealthy workplace behaviours, such as unequal opportunities and workload distribution in the public and private sector, absence of safety and security and improper implementation of gender policies deter women from entering the workforce.³⁶

Quality of Education and Sustainability

The link between educational attainment and employment has been explored in several studies. According to these studies, since the early 1990s, there have been growing gender gaps among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who participate in the labor force in emerging countries. The gender

³¹ International Labour Organisation. (2023). Achieving Gender Equality at Work- Executive Summary. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/publication/wcms_881011.pdf

³² Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka, Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, OECD 2014 < https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf>

³³ International Labour Organization, A Quantum Leap For Gender Equality- For A Better Future Of Work For All, Geneva 2019 p.25 < https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_674831.pdf>

³⁴ *Id*

³⁵ ILO: Women still less likely to be active in the labour market than men in most of the world, (2018), http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_619119/lang--en/index.htm (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

³⁶ *Id*

gap in educational achievement, however, has significantly narrowed.³⁷ This seems anomalous, considering the fact that education seemingly has the capability of providing employment to a large extent. Research points out the nature and quality of education to be a determining factor. While the right to fundamental or primary education is important, it may not be sufficient to sustain women in the labour market on a long-term basis. The hypothesis of the U-shaped curve has been frequently used to show this dichotomy.³⁸

Research in areas of female labour participation have often pointed to a U-shaped relationship between national income and female labour participation.³⁹ Although women's labour force participation tends to rise as economies expand, the relationship is not consistent throughout the country. Lower female labour force participation exists in middle income countries, while a larger percentage is observed in developed countries.⁴⁰ Due to a variety of economic and social factors, including economic growth, education, and discriminatory societal norms, there is considerable diversity in the labor force participation of emerging countries.⁴¹

Enhancing women's educational attainment beyond secondary school is a crucial policy area when looking more widely at measures to improve women's access to quality employment.⁴² The theory postulates that in low-income countries, female participation in labour may decrease during early

³⁷ ILO, World Employment Social Outlook- Trends for Women 2018, p.6
<https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_619577.pdf> htm (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

³⁸ Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, Routledge & CRC Press, (2007)

³⁹ Sinha, JN (1967) Dynamics of female participation in economic activity in a developing economy. In: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (ed), *Proceedings of the World Population Conference*, vol.IV. United Nations, New York

⁴⁰ *Id*

⁴¹ Arnold Lincove, *Growth, Girls' Education, and Female Labor: A Longitudinal Analysis*, *The Journal of Developing Areas* 45 (2008)

⁴² *Id*

stages of development, when the economy shifts to non-agricultural sector work, mechanization and urbanization.⁴³ Physical restrictions, gender discrimination, and the obligations of big domestic families may all contribute to this.⁴⁴ In later periods, Women enter white collar and service sector jobs, due to the reward received for participation in such sectors. Women entering white collared jobs tend to stay in the labour market for longer periods rather than other forms of informal employment, as indicated by the high female labour force participation rates in developed countries.⁴⁵

Education becomes an intervening factor in this regard more so, in this period between early stages of mechanization and later stages of economic development of tertiary sectors when women enter white collar jobs. Beyond secondary education, literacy continues to be a key factor in the upward trajectory of the U-shaped curve for women's entry to white collar occupations, enabling them to remain in the workforce for longer periods of time. Research shows that access to education plays an important role in women's ability to reap benefits of modernization and access to high quality employment increasing the female labour participation ratio.⁴⁶ Women's educational advancements lag behind those of men's, which may prompt them to leave the workforce. However, when women's educational levels ascend and robust employment prospects become accessible, women start to participate in the labor market in greater numbers.⁴⁷ Therefore, the correlation between education and workforce participation is essential in understanding whether development translates to economic freedom for

⁴³ *Id*

⁴⁴ *Id*

⁴⁵ *Id*

⁴⁶ Luca J. Uberti & Elodie Douarin, *The Feminisation U, Cultural Norms, and the Plough*, 36 *J Popul Econ* 5 (2023)

⁴⁷ *Id*

women.⁴⁸ While increase in primary schooling has been correlated with home production for women in less developed countries, increase in secondary schooling enables women to participate in the labour market.⁴⁹ After a generation of women accessing secondary schooling and participating in the labour market, they may experience the reward of greater wages which would enable future generations of women to participate in the labour market.⁵⁰

Studies conducted in third world countries like Brazil have added to this stance, where women with primary schooling have not participated in labor markets in large numbers, despite increasing wages. Brazilian women having a secondary education have relatively displayed higher labor force participation.⁵¹ Similarly in India, women with schooling beyond secondary schooling have been demonstrated to have participated more in the female labour force.⁵²

These findings imply that there is a threshold for payoff for women having a secondary education and beyond in the labour market. Lesser education indicates the probability to be employed in informal sectors and less regular employment which may discourage women's labour market participation. Understanding this association between education and the labour market, becomes essential, in light of the existing labour market conditions in third

⁴⁸ *Supra* note 38

⁴⁹ *Id*

⁵⁰ *Id*

⁵¹ David Lam & Suzanne Duryea, Effects of Schooling on Fertility, Labor Supply, and Investments in Children, with Evidence from Brazil, 34 *The Journal of Human Resources* 160 (1999), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/146306> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁵² The National Sample Survey data for India for 2011–2012 showed that the lowest participation percentage occurs for women having a higher secondary school education at 11.9% in urban areas and 19.3% in rural areas. This participation percentage is higher among better-educated women, with 27.4% in urban areas. In rural areas the number is 32.7% for women with an undergraduate degree. Ruchika Chaudhary & Sher Verick, *Female Labour Force Participation in India and Beyond*, (2014),

<https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/iiloilowps/994867893402676.htm>

world countries. The next section reviews the situation of the female labour force in third world countries, to add further weightage to the overarching arguments of this paper, in how education as an instrument can relieve women from vulnerable employment.

Vulnerable Employment, Unemployment and Informality amongst Women in Developing Countries

Data from developing countries has demonstrated a staggering picture of the nature of women's employment in the labour market for developing countries. In 2023, as per ILO's report on World Social Outlook, labour force participation for women stood at 47.4 percent for women while for men it stood at 72.3 percent for men.⁵³ Data from ILO reports in 2018 focusing exclusively on trends of women at work revealed that the major areas of labour for women have been family workers or their own account work and in the case of unpaid jobs, mostly in the informal sector. The report observed that in developing countries the share of contributing family workers was more amongst women at 42 percent than men at 20 percent. In developed countries, the number of women as contributing family workers is much lesser at 6.9 percent.⁵⁴ Own account work i.e self-employment was also more common amongst women in developing countries, while in developed countries, this nature of work for women was limited in comparison.⁵⁵ Women to a large extent has been overrepresented in the developing countries in respect of informal employment. Women's work is largely categorized under the informal sector since mostly the nature of work is family or own-

⁵³ World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023, (2023), http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/WCMS_865332/lang--en/index.htm (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁵⁴ *Id*

⁵⁵ *Id*

account work. Thus, women make up one-third of all informal employment in developing nations.⁵⁶ The labour market status of family workers and account workers remains vulnerable, since they have a lesser likelihood to receive social protection rights and formal employment bound in contractual obligations.⁵⁷ Lower rates of female labor force participation, the significant gender pay gap, shorter or interrupted employment careers, and the overrepresentation of women in vulnerable and informal work thus impact their eligibility for social protection measures. This points towards vulnerability amongst female labour in developing countries, as a result of which ensuring education becomes crucial. Reduction of discrimination in education and the workplace can help sustain women in more permanent sectors.

International Legal Framework on Access to Education

Internationally a number of Conventions have been adopted to guarantee education of women. In this regard, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a ground-breaking tool. CEDAW applies the rights safeguarded by the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in pursuance of the principles laid down in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in relation to women and girls. Therefore, in terms of normative substance and state-level legal requirements regarding the subject of gender equality in general, CEDAW is the most important and substantial treaty. ICESCR under Articles 13 & 14 along with ICCPR & UDHR (Article 26)

⁵⁶ *Id*

⁵⁷ DCOMM, *Vulnerable Employment and Poverty on the Rise, Interview with ILO Chief of Employment Trends Unit* (2010), http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives/features/WCMS_120470/lang--en/index.htm (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

consists of non-discrimination clauses and equality clauses which guarantees education for all. These are supplemented by Convention on Rights of Child, 1989 along with Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 which apply the right to education to vulnerable groups with a focus on intersectional application of non-discrimination in education.

Article 10 of the CEDAW is the most comprehensive provision on education of women and girl children and provides the normative content in right to education. The CEDAW guarantees a wide range of rights, including equal access to education at all levels in both urban and rural areas, equal educational quality, equal opportunities for benefits and scholarships, lower rates of female dropout, equal opportunity to participate in health and planning, access to educational materials on health, advice on family planning, etc.⁵⁸ In addition to the CEDAW. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which was adopted in 1960, forbids discrimination in education on the basis of any factor, including sex. The UNESCO Convention is the foremost standard setting instrument related to education. The Convention affirms that education is a fundamental human right and highlights states' obligation to provide free and compulsory education along with making secondary education accessible to all, repeatedly affirming non-discrimination in terms of providing educational access.

Apart from these, in recognition of the relationship between education and employment, Article 1 of ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 No. 111 defines discrimination to include employment and occupation to include access to vocational training. Article 3 urges State parties to promote educational opportunities which would

⁵⁸ See Article 10, Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 1979

observe a national policy enabling national conditions and practice, equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating any discrimination.⁵⁹ Through numerous work strategies, ILO has supported international education goals by preventing child labour and promoting social dialogue.⁶⁰ ILO and UNESCO have promoted principles of quality teaching through recommendations concerning teaching personnel.⁶¹

Soft Law Instruments and Ensuring Access to Education

In addition to the international instruments discussed previously, there are soft law tools that compel states to act strategically in order to address injustices and deficiencies in girls' and women's access to education and training. Right to education received limelight in the UN General Assembly Resolution on Education for All in 1997.⁶² In addition other soft law instruments include the Millennium Development Goals, 2000, the Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, the World Declaration on Education for All, 1990 and the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in the year 2000 under the UN Millennium Declaration. The MDG 2 aimed

⁵⁹ See C111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_COD E:C111

⁶⁰ Education Sector, International Labour Organisation. <https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/education/lang--en/index.htm> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁶¹ Along with UNESCO, the ILO has promoted principles of quality teaching through two Recommendations concerning teaching personnel, as well as the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel. Available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/education/lang--en/index.htm>

⁶² United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Education for All December 1997 [A/RES/52/8430 January 1998] <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146253>

to ensure that all children enrol and complete primary education regardless of their parental incomes.⁶³ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was further adopted in 2015, which includes Sustainable Development Goals and targets aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls, is one of the most significant soft law instruments.⁶⁴ The international community adopted Sustainable Goal 5 and also Goal 8 demanding full and productive employment for men and women alike, along with equal pay for equal work by 2030. SDG 4 emphasizes on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. Vocational training to encourage skill development, has also received recognition in some instruments such as the UNESCO under the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education 1989. While there are ample legal instruments emphasizing education as a fundamental right, most of them have generally focused on the right to education rather than secondary education or higher secondary education or skill development have received lesser focus. It is in this light that organizations like G20 become significant, since the policy commitments and recognition of areas like STEM or skilling women, serve as pragmatic standards for policy adoption by member states. The next section analyses some of the policy and strategies adopted by member states for ensuring education and skill development.

Measures by G20 Countries - Facilitating Access to Education

In light of the discussion on the importance of secondary education, it becomes relevant to discuss the role of G20. The structure of G20 has allowed

⁶³ See Millenium Development Goals 2000-2015. <<https://research.un.org/en/docs/dev/2000-2015#:~:text=In%202000%2C%20the%20Millennium%20Declaration,Eradicate%20extreme%20poverty%20and%20hunger>>

⁶⁴ See Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/sdgs/about-2030-agenda-sustainable-development#:~:text=Adopted%20unanimously%20in%202015%20by,entry%20points%20and%20opportunities%20for>

it to undertake commitments in a much flexible manner. Rather than binding obligations, G20 generally has a system of ministerial meetings, communiques and finally a leader's declaration towards a policy commitment.⁶⁵

So far G20 countries have undertaken a number of policy measures to promote education amongst women. A National Strategy of Action for Women for 2023–2030 has been approved in the Russian Federation, with a focus on educating women and increasing their participation in the digital economy through exposure to STEM skills, opportunities for lifelong learning and advanced training, flexible work schedules and entrepreneurship.⁶⁶ Turkey has been upgrading its National work Strategy with an emphasis on expanding work options for women and reducing obstacles to their enrolment in higher education.⁶⁷ By offering scholarships and encouraging STEM entrepreneurship, Australia has put programs in place to increase awareness of women's educational opportunities and participation in STEM-related fields of work.⁶⁸ Initiatives in South Africa have focused on STEAM by bringing an additional element of arts. Programs to help girls from rural regions access education and job prospects in STEAM sectors, such as the Girls Fly Programme Africa run by UNICEF South Africa have been undertaken.⁶⁹ Integration of women from vulnerable groups such as migrants through education has also been the focus of policy initiatives in Australia

⁶⁵ Brian Bonner, *What Role Should the G20 Play?*, GIS Reports (Feb. 24, 2023), <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/g20-international-organization/> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁶⁶ OECD & ILO “Women at Work in G20 countries: Progress and Policy Action in 2022: Prepared for the G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting under India’s Presidency 2023, Indore, 20-21 July 2023” July 2023. < https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/genericdocument/wcms_888717.pdf>

⁶⁷ *Id*

⁶⁸ *Id*

⁶⁹ *Id*

and Germany.⁷⁰ In light of its presidency, it is worthwhile to understand India's existing initiatives to promote education and STEM participation along with its goals for G20.

India's Leadership in 2023

India has the highest employment-to-population ratio in the world at 72.2 percent for men and 25 per cent for women, according to World Bank data.⁷¹ Despite its emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, only 14% of scientists, engineers and technologists working in research development institutes in India are women.⁷² Most of the persons in higher management and higher educational institutions are men, indicating that a large number of women in India are involved in family work, own account work or informal labour.⁷³ The Covid-19 pandemic has made matters worse. According to World Bank data, female unemployment rates increased to 5.5 percent in 2020, from 5.2 percent in 2013. Several women employed in the informal sector, such as house-help or daily wage earners, have lost their jobs.

India already has a strong legal and institutional framework for guaranteeing education for women. India has already ratified the CEDAW.⁷⁴ Article 14 of the Constitution places the emphasis on equality before the law, while Article

⁷⁰ *Id*

⁷¹ Tirtha Samant, "Women: Education, employment, empowerment" Observer Research Foundation < <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/women-education-employment-empowerment/#:~:text=are%20largely%20men,-.The%20employment%20to%20population%20percentage%20in%20India%20according%20to%20the.no%20working%20women%20or%20researchers.>> (last visited Aug 25, 2023)

⁷² Soniya Agrawal, *Women in STEM: The Growing Numbers, Challenges and Whether It Translates into Jobs*, ThePrint (Jul. 23, 2021), <https://theprint.in/india/education/women-in-stem-the-growing-numbers-challenges-and-whether-it-translates-into-jobs/700564/> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁷³ *Supra* note 71

⁷⁴ India signed CEDAW on July 39, 1980 and ratified it on July 9, 1993, with certain reservations.

15 allows the state to lay down specific provisions for women and children.⁷⁵ The fundamental right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years was introduced in Article 21A of the Constitution through the Eighty Sixth Amendment Act in 2002. In pursuance of the same, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009 was enacted which has affirmed the right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school satisfying certain essential norms and standards for every child. Right to education has been consistently recognised as a fundamental by the Indian judiciary in *Mohini Jain v State of Karnataka*⁷⁶ and *Unni Krishnan J.P. v State of Andhra Pradesh*.⁷⁷ The government has emphasized upon increasing the average number of years spent in school per person a key component of its youth policy recognising education as a right that is crucial to the country's continued economic and social growth. However, despite a steady rise in the number of girls and women attending schools and universities in India, the educational system is beset by poor retention rates, subpar learning outcomes, and unequal access across gender, social, and ethnic divisions.⁷⁸

The policy frameworks undertaken by the Indian government for ensuring the right to education have also been notable. One of the foremost policy initiatives in this regard is the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country.⁷⁹ To facilitate parents to save for their daughters' future education & marriage, in 2015 the government launched a savings scheme Sukanya

⁷⁵ See the Constitution of India, 1950

⁷⁶ 1992 AIR 1858

⁷⁷ 1993 AIR 217

⁷⁸ *Supra* note 41

⁷⁹ Empowerment of Women through Education, Skilling & Micro-Financing | NITI Aayog, <https://www.niti.gov.in/empowerment-women-through-education-skilling-micro-financing> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

Samridhi Account Scheme where a savings account with high interest rates can be opened by parents.⁸⁰ As part of the Samagra Shiksha Holistic Education program, the government has also established residential schools (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, or KGBVs) for underprivileged girls in Classes 6 through 12.⁸¹

With regard to STEM, the government has launched the Scheme for Empowering Girls in STEM (Vigyan Jyoti Programme) in 2019 to address the underrepresentation of women in different fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in the country. Female candidates are selected from Class 9-12 and encouraged to go on to higher education and pursue a career in the STEM fields.⁸² In addition, the government has introduced the WISE-KIRAN (Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing) Scheme to encourage the involvement of women in the domains of science and technology.⁸³ Most notably, very recently, women education received wide coverage in the National Education Policy 2020. In the NEP 2020, Girls' education is part of the section on Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, incorporating girls' education as part of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).⁸⁴ In order to provide girls with access to quality and equitable educational opportunities, a Gender Inclusion Fund was included in the National Education Policy (2020). The fund seeks to eliminate all disparities in opportunities for girls focusing on increasing enrollment in school and enable girls to choose further education by providing free textbooks and uniforms,

⁸⁰ G20 alliance for empowerment and progression of women's economic representation, <https://g20empower-india.org/en/home/education> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁸¹ Samagra Shiksha, <https://samagra.education.gov.in/kgbv.html> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁸² *Id*

⁸³ *Supra note 80*

⁸⁴ See National Education Policy 2020 p.24

<https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf>

stipends, self-defense lessons, sanitary pad vending machines and opportunities to develop their leadership abilities through discussions and debates. State governments can support and broaden community-based initiatives that address local challenges to girls' education.⁸⁵

India has taken an ambitious step to promote equal, quality and inclusive education for its G20 agenda.⁸⁶ Following the launch of the National Education Policy, the education minister has emphasized education as a priority focus for G20 under India's presidency. India has focused a lot on incorporating digital and edtech platforms for promoting education for providing inclusive and quality education for all.⁸⁷ The W20 under India's Presidency has emphasized Education & Skill Development as a priority area along with other areas like Women in Entrepreneurship, Women Leadership at Grassroots, Bridging the Gender Digital Divide, Women & Girls as change makers and Climate Resilience Action.⁸⁸ The G20 Empower group has also identified education as a key factor for women empowerment and hailed it as a priority sector.⁸⁹ More specifically, women's earning potential is significantly impacted by education in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).⁹⁰

⁸⁵ *Supra note 80*

⁸⁶ G20 Education Working Group 2023 to focus on areas for an inclusive, equitable, relevant and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1894472> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁸⁷ 2023 G20 summit: "Education is one of the priority areas of G20," says Dharmendra Pradhan, India Today, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/2023-g20-summit-education-is-one-of-the-priority-areas-of-g20-says-dharmendra-pradhan-2298243-2022-11-17> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁸⁸ W20 (Women 20) for India's G20 Presidency, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1902349> (last visited Aug 25, 2023).

⁸⁹ *Id*

⁹⁰ *Supra note 80*

The G20 Conference on Women Empowerment, recognising education crucial to empowering women called urged member states to increase investments in affordable, inclusive, safe and quality education, including in STEM, providing vocational training, skilling programmes and ensuring foundational and financial literacy⁹¹. Further, the agenda of the Conference has focused on removing stereotypes in education curricula through gender responsive training, bridging digital gender divide, removing gender related gaps in relevant socio-economic sectors. Promoting public spaces for education, investment in affordable care facilities and removing inequitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work to facilitate women to access educational opportunities, are also some of the areas where member states have been urged to take action in the 2023 Conference Statement.⁹²

Conclusion

The above discussion establishes a direct correlation between education and long-term, sustainable employability of women. The adoption of the Indian agenda on education in its G20 presidency is a welcome step in recognising the importance of education. In line with promoting long term employability, STEM education and increasing digital literacy along with ensuring secondary education has been the focus of the G20 agenda. The Indian presidency has also witnessed schemes launched and focused on raising awareness on education, skilling in digital means of education. India's approach on education has been adopted with a pragmatic focus on employability, which becomes crucial for third world countries.

⁹¹ *Id*

⁹²G20 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, Chair's Statement, 2nd-4th Aug 2023, https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/G20_Chair's_Statement_Women's_Ministerial.pdf

Despite a strong international legal framework on education, often policy commitments by organisations like G20 become vital in achieving sustainability for women in the labour market. The G20, being a regional organization, its working groups bringing experts together can pave the way for intersectional approaches to gender and education. Platforms like W20 and EMPOWER engagement groups can study the issues at ground levels and urge member states to undertake comprehensive measures. Most of the G20 agendas have focused on skill development and providing quality education for women and children. India's re-emphasis on such agendas have brought these commitments of G20 in the limelight. While India's approach towards education for women in the G20 agenda is commendable, there are more areas for improvement especially with regards to vulnerable and marginalised sections. As a large portion of India's female population has been involved in family work or in the informal labour sector, skill development becomes an essential part of education for women from such sectors. An intersectional study focusing on the core vulnerable groups in terms of linguistics, caste and religion is the need of the hour to uplift women from such sectors and integrate them into the mainstream labour market. Equitability in the labour market and fair participation remain core areas through which India can effectively implement its gender led development agenda under this G20 presidency.