

GENDER PARITY: A PERSISTENT CHALLENGE IN THE ECONOMIC REALM

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ABSTRACT

Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviors assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society; whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. In its social, historical and cultural aspects, gender is a function of power relationship between men and women where men are considered superior to women. Therefore, gender may be understood as a man-made concept, while 'sex' is natural or biological characteristics of human beings. This paper is an attempt to highlight the progress towards parity between men and women in four areas: educational attainment, health and survival, economic opportunity and political empowerment in India and at Global.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Parity, Economic, Empowerment and Gender Gap.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Gender equality" aims to achieve genuine equality between men and women by planting the idea of respecting human rights deeply into society's soil. This century is significant in that equality between men and women has become accepted as a universal value and that the construction of the social framework has taken place to materialize that concept for the first time in human history. Referring to suffrage, for example, which is one of the most basic indices of male-and-female equality, in the beginning of the century, only New Zealand had given women the right to vote at the national-government level; almost a century later, there are few countries today that do not extend suffrage to women.

In line with efforts made by the international community such as those by the United Nations, Japan has been endeavoring to establish laws and systems to realize gender equality in the post-war years, ever since gender equality was enshrined in the Japanese Constitution. As a result, it seems that gender equality has been achieved to a significant extent. Although laws and systems may appear impartial to men and women, they sometimes maintain and reinforce discrimination against women and the entrenched norms imposing stereotyped roles for men and women. In some aspects, people's thoughts and actions, as well as customs and traditions, are discriminatory and prejudiced against women and are based on stereotyping regarding men and women's roles. Such a way of thinking in society makes it difficult to achieve genuine gender equality, and not only prevents women from reaching their full potential in various fields but also hinders men from seeking freedom in their lives. Hence, it is necessary to broadly analyze and reform people's thoughts, customs and traditions in society, not merely to consolidate laws and systems, in view of substantial equality between men and women.

Japan's socioeconomic environment is at a historic turning point, experiencing changes at an unprecedented rate, including the lower birth rate, the progress of an aging society, the maturation and internationalization of economic activities, and the sophistication of information communications. Such socioeconomic changes raise the need to swiftly achieve a society with gender equality. Gender equality is basically an issue concerning human rights, and we need to make constant efforts to ensure it regardless of the socioeconomic conditions. At the same time, we should strongly recognize that it is absolutely essential for both men and women to

participate in all corners of society as equal partners, in order to explore new frontiers for the development of Japanese society amid the rapidly changing socioeconomic environment.

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations enshrines the "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women." However, many women throughout the world still suffer from poverty and starvation and are threatened by the violation of their human rights due to civil war and regional conflicts. Looking at the facts in the real world, we must admit that many problems are serious and need to be tackled by the global community. It is impossible to raise women's status without solving problems at an international scale such as poverty, population and environmental issues. But on the other hand, such global-scale problems cannot be solved without pursuing gender equality.

The United Nations has been aiming for "equality, development, and peace" since 1975, the International Women's Year. Gender equality is indispensable to achieve harmonious, sustainable socioeconomic and human development. Fusae Ichikawa, the pioneer of the Japanese suffragette movement stated "no equality without peace, no peace without equality", stressing that peace and equality are mutually dependent to achieve either. The significance of her statement remains unchanged today. Peace, development and equality are closely correlated and are complements of each other, each one being equally indispensable.

II. GLOBAL GENDER GAP 2016:

The global workplace gender gap is getting wider and economic parity between the sexes could take as many as 170 years to close after a dramatic slowdown in progress. The slowdown is partly because of chronic imbalances in salaries and labor force participation, despite the fact that, in 95 countries out of the 144 that are ranked, women attend university in equal or higher numbers than men.

2.1 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEF'S GLOBAL GENDER GAP 2016:

❖ Progress towards parity in the key economic pillar of gender has slowed dramatically with the gap—which stands at 59%—now larger than at any point since 2008.

- ❖ Factors for declining are, one is salary, with women around the world on average earning just over half of what men earn despite, on average, working longer hours, taking paid and unpaid work into account.
 - ❖ Another persistent challenge is stagnant labor force participation, with the global average for women at 54%, compared to 81% for men.
 - ❖ In 2015, projections based on the Global Gender Gap Report data suggested that the economic gap could be closed within 118 years, or by 2133
 - ❖ The education gender gap has closed 1% over the past year to over 95%, making it one of the two areas where most progress has been made to date.
 - ❖ Health and survival, the other pillar to have closed 96% of the gap, has deteriorated marginally.
 - ❖ Two-thirds of the 144 countries shows to claim to have fully closed their gender gap in sex ratio at birth, while more than one-third have fully closed the gap in terms of healthy life expectancy.
 - ❖ The pillar where the gender gap looms largest, political empowerment, is also the one that has seen the greatest amount of progress since the WEF began measuring the gender gap in 2006.
 - ❖ This is now over 23%; 1% greater than 2015 and nearly 10% higher than in 2006.
- However, improvements are starting from a low base: only two countries have reached parity in parliament and only four have reached parity on ministerial roles, according to the latest globally comparable data. The slow rate of progress towards gender parity, especially in the economic realm, poses a particular risk given the fact that many jobs that employ a majority of women are likely to be hit proportionately hardest by the coming age of technological disruption known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. “Women and men must be equal partners in managing the challenges our world faces—and in reaping the opportunities. Both voices are critical in ensuring the Fourth Industrial Revolution delivers its promise for society,” said Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the WEF.

2.2 SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

Globally, the leading four nations continue to be Scandinavian: Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, in that order. The next highest placed nation is Rwanda, which moves one place ahead

of Ireland to the fifth position. Following Ireland, the Philippines remains unchanged at seventh, narrowly ahead of Slovenia (8) and New Zealand (9), which both move up one place. With Switzerland dropping out of the top 10, the 10th position is taken up by Nicaragua.

TABLE: 1**GLOBAL TOP 10 COUNTRIES**

THE GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX	GLOBAL RANK
Iceland	1
Finland	2
Norway	3
Sweden	4
Rwanda	5

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016

2.3 GENDER PARITY IN TOP FIVE COUNTRIES**ICELAND (1)**

- Closes more than 87% of its overall gender gap.
- It remains the top performer on Political Empowerment and in the top ten on Economic Participation and Opportunity on the back of solid improvements in the number of women among legislators, senior officials and managers.
- Income scales on the estimate earned income indicator reveals that there remains an overall income gender gap to close.
- The country has fully closed its gender gap on Educational Attainment.
- Iceland has closed approximately 12% of its total gender gap, making it one of the fastest-improving countries in the world.

FINLAND (2)

- Overtakes Norway and regains its second place in the world, closing nearly 85% of its overall gender gap.
- It has fully closed its gender gap on Educational Attainment and Health and Survival and remains the runner-up on Political Empowerment, reaching parity in the number of women in ministerial positions.

➤ Estimated earned income scale reveals that Finland, too, has some work left to do to fully close its overall income gender gap.

NORWAY (3)

➤ Drops a spot and returns to its previous third-place position, closing more than 84% of its overall gender gap.

➤ Estimated earned income scale it remains in the global top ten in this category as confirmed by an equally strong performance on the Wage equality for similar work indicator.

➤ Norway also remains the third top performer on the Political Empowerment.

➤ It moves up four spots on the Educational Attainment but its gender gap remains open—as does its Health and Survival gender gap, which has in fact slightly widened since last year.

SWEDEN (4)

➤ Maintains its respective ranking as fourth best for the eighth year running, closing more than 81% of its overall gender gap.

➤ It takes a strong position on the Economic Participation and Opportunity.

➤ Due to, among other factors, an increase in female legislators, senior officials and managers, where the country moves up seven positions compared to last year. It also nearly closes its Educational Attainment gender gap.

➤ On the Political Empowerment, Sweden drops a rank despite reaching parity in the number of women in ministerial positions.

RWANDA (5)

➤ Crosses the threshold of closing 80% of its gender gap and overtakes Ireland to break into the top five for the first time.

➤ This is mostly due to improvements on its Economic Participation and Opportunity, where the country moves up six spots over last year on the back of improved parity in estimated earned income.

➤ It remains the country with the highest share of female parliamentarians in the world, 64%, and maintains its respective score on the Political Empowerment despite dropping a spot to eighth.

➤ Its Educational Attainment gender gap remains open and ranks 112th despite enrolment in tertiary education improvements. Its Health and Survival gender gap also remains open, placing it 94th in the world.

The US (45) loses 17 places since last year, primarily due to a more transparent measure for the estimated earned income. Other major economies in the top 20 include Germany (13), France (17) and the UK (20). Among the BRICS grouping, the highest-placed nation remains South Africa (15), which moves up two places since last year with improvements across all pillars. The Russian Federation (75) is next, followed by Brazil (79). India (87) gains 21 spots and overtakes China (99) with improvements across Economic Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment.

III. INDIA RANKS 87

India is ranked 87 out of 144, improving from its 108 position in 2015. It has closed its gender gap by 2% in a year: its gap now stands at 68% across the four pillars of economy, education, health and political representation.

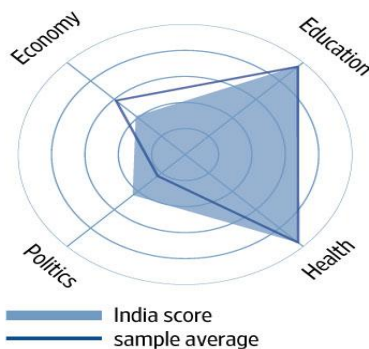
TABLE:2

INDIA RANKS 87 AMONG 144 COUNTRIES IN GENDER PARITY 2016

At a glance

India **87** rank
out of 144 countries

Scores at a glance



Key indicators

GDP (\$ billions)	2,073.54
GDP per capita (constant '11 intl. \$, PPP)	5,730
Total populations (thousands)	1,311,050.53
Population growth rate (%)	1.15
Population sex ratio (female/male)	0.93
Human capital optimization (%)	57.73

	2016		2006	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Global Gender Gap Index	87	0.683	98	0.601
Economic participation and opportunity	136	0.408	110	0.397
Educational attainment	113	0.950	102	0.819
Health and survival	142	0.942	103	0.962
Political empowerment	9	0.433	20	0.227
Rank out of	144		115	

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016

3.1 ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY

This covers participation of women in the workforce, wage gaps and the ratio of women in senior work positions. The world in general is not doing too well on this index: globally, 54% of working-age women take part in the formal economy, as compared to 81% of men. In India, just 28% of females participate in the formal workforce, in comparison to 82% of males. On this sub-index, India's rank is 136. On wage equality, India ranks 103rd – worse than Nepal, Iran, Bhutan, Yemen, Uganda and dozens of other countries. The report notes that Indian law does not actually mandate wage equality for men and women. Another sub-index explored in the report is unpaid work. Men, on an average, do just 34% of the unpaid work that women do across the world. “Research shows that this imbalance starts early, with girls spending 30% more of their time on unpaid work than boys,” the report says. Even in general, combining both paid and unpaid work, women put in 50 minutes more of work time each day than men.

Indian women work for an average of 537 minutes per day, as compared to 442 minutes a day put in by men. While women do 66% of unpaid work in a day, while men do just 12%. Financial independence, too, is lower for Indian women. While 62% of Indian men have some kind of bank account, the figure is just 43% for women. The appointment of women to senior positions at work is also a reflection of the gender gap being bridged. Globally, the average female representation on boards of companies is just 14%. For India, the figure is even lower – women constitute just 10% of the boards of publicly traded companies.

TABLE:3

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY IN INDIA

	RANK	SCORE	AVG	FEMALE	MALE	F/M RATIO
ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY	136	0.408	0.586	-	-	0.41
LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION	135	0.344	0.665	28	82	0.34
WAGE EQUALITY FOR SIMILAR WORK	103	0.573	0.622	-	-	0.57
ESTIMATED EARN INCOME (US \$, PPP)	137	0.232	0.502	2,103	9,045	0.23

LEGISLATORS , SENIOR OFFICIALS, MANAGERS	-	-	0.35	-	-	-
PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL WORKERS	-	-	0.862	-	-	-

Source: World Economic Forum, 2016

3.2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Globally, gender gaps in education have narrowed down tremendously, with very small gaps in primary and secondary education and almost complete parity in tertiary education. While women and men emerge from tertiary education with similar skills and knowledge, there is a rather wide global gender gap of 47% in the STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – with more men taking up these fields than women.

Under education, India ranks 124th on female literacy rate, with 63% women and 81% men literate. Ahead of India in on this sub-index are countries like Sri Lanka, Botswana and the Maldives. This is despite India having no gender gap in enrolment in primary and secondary education, and just a 2 percentage point gap in enrolment in tertiary education.

TABLE:4

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF INDIA

	RANK	SCORE	AVG	FEMALE	MALE	F/M RATIO
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	113	0.980	0.955	-	-	0.95
LITERACY RATE	124	0.778	0.897	63	81	0.78
ENROLMENT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION	1	1.000	0.980	93	92	1.01
ENROLMENT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION	1	1.000	0.970	62	61	1.01
ENROLMENT IN TERTIARY EDUCATION	99	0.936	0.930	23	25	0.94

Source: World Economic Forum, 2016

3.3 HEALTH AND SURVIVAL IN INDIA

This covers a country's sex ratio and female healthy life expectancy. According to this year's report, 38 countries around the world have managed to successfully close the gender gap on these indicators, but India, Armenia and China have fared the lowest.

India's poor performance here is largely due to its sex ratio of just 943 females to 1,000 males. On this sub-index, India ranks 142nd. In comparison, the country ranks 71st in healthy life expectancy of females. Indian women are also married at a younger age compared with Indian men – while 74% of Indian women are married before the age of 25, just 35% of men are married by that age. It also sees some regression on women's estimated earned income and continues to rank third-lowest in the world on Health and Survival, remaining the world's least-improved country.

TABLE:5

HEALTH AND SURVIVAL OF INDIA

	RANK	SCORE	AVG	FEMALE	MALE	F/M RATIO
HEALTH AND SURVIVAL	142	0.942	0.957	-	-	0.94
SEX RATIO AT BIRTH	142	0.893	0.918	-	-	0.89
HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY	71	1.054	1.043	59	56	1.05

Source: World Economic Forum, 2016

3.4 POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

The majority of countries evaluated in the report have never had a female head of state. In comparison, India has had two female heads of state – Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Present Pratibha Patil – whose terms jointly add up to 21 years of being ruled by women. On this sub-index, India's rank is 2nd, after Bangladesh. But on the participation of women in Parliament, India lags behind Bangladesh, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt, and more than a hundred other countries, with a rank of 112. In comparison, India ranks 50th on the presence of women in ministerial positions, with 22% of Indian ministers being women. Finland fares the best in this category,

with women forming 63% of their ministers. Progress on overall gender equality is actually slowing down.

TABLE:6
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

	RANK	SCORE	AVG	FEMALE	MALE
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT	9	0.433	0.233	-	-
WOMEN IN PARTICIPATION	112	0.136	0.269	12	88
WOMEN IN MINISTERIAL POSITION	50	0.286	0.238	22	78
YEARS WITH FEMALE HEAD OF STATE	2	0.723	0.204	21	29

Source: World Economic Forum, 2016

India is also among a group of countries that have made key investments in women's education but have generally not removed barriers to women's participation in the workforce and are thus not seeing returns on their investments in terms of development of one half of their nation's human capital. This group also includes Iran, Islamic Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Chile. These countries have an educated but untapped talent pool and would have much to gain from women's greater participation in the workforce.

IV.GENDER PARITY PROGRESS ACHIEVED BETWEEN (2006 – 2016)

With the economic and business case for gender parity becoming ever clearer, there is an urgent need for reliable metrics to capture the progress achieved over time. Since 2006, the rate of change helps predict the projected time to closing the divide between women and men's parity in employment, education, health and politics.

All things held equal, with current trends, the overall global gender gap can be closed in 83 years across the 107 countries covered since the inception of the report just within the statistical lifetime of baby girls born today. However, the most challenging gender gaps remain in the economic sphere and in health. At the current rate of change, and given the widening economic gender gap since last year, it will not be closed for another 170 years. The economic gender gap this year has reverted back to where it stood in 2008, after a peak in 2013.

On the other hand, on current trends, the education-specific gender gap could be reduced to parity within the next 10 years. The currently widest gender gap, in the political dimension, is also the one exhibiting the most progress, narrowing by 9% since 2006. On current trends, it could be closed within 82 years. The time to close the health gender gap remains undefined. Formally the smallest gap, it has oscillated in size with a general downward trend. Today, the gap is larger than it stood in 2006, in part due to specific issues in select countries, in particular China and India.

TABLE:7**GLOBAL GENDER GAP OF INDIA – A COMPARISON**

	RANK (2016)	SCORE	RANK (2006)	SCORE
GLOBAL GENDER GAP	87	0.683	98	0.601
ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY	136	0.408	110	0.397
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	113	0.950	102	0.819
HEALTH AND SURVIVAL	142	0.942	103	0.962
POLITICAL EMPORMENT	9	0.433	20	0.227

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016

Some regions should expect to see their gender gaps narrow faster than the global rate of change. Among these are South Asia, with a projected closing of the gender gap in 46 years, Western

Europe in 61 years, Latin America in 72 years and Sub-Saharan Africa, due to achieve parity in 79 years. Projections for other world regions suggest closing their gaps will take longer than 100 years, namely 129 years in the Middle East and North Africa, 146 years in East Asia and the Pacific, and 149 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Given the slow progress over the last decade, the gender gap in North America is expected to close in 158 years. None of these forecasts are foregone conclusions. Instead they reflect the current state of progress and serve as a call to action to policymakers and other stakeholders to accelerate gender equality.

V. PROGRESS OF SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

South Asia With an average remaining gender gap of 33%, the South Asia region is the second-lowest scoring on this year's Global Gender Gap Index, ahead of the Middle East and North Africa and behind the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Bangladesh and India are the top-ranked countries in the region, having closed just under 70% and 68% of their overall gender gap, respectively, while the lowest-ranked countries are Bhutan and Pakistan, having closed 64% and 56% of their overall gender gap, respectively. No country in the region has fully closed its Educational Attainment gender gap, and only one country, Sri Lanka, has fully closed its Health and Survival gender gap. However, the region is also home to one of the top five climbers over the past decade on the overall Index and on Educational Attainment: Nepal. Of the seven countries from the region included in the Index this year, two countries have increased their overall score compared to last year, while five have seen it decreasing. Bangladesh (72) is the region's top performer, recording progress this year on the Political Empowerment gender gap but a widening of the gap on women's labour force participation and estimated earned income. It is followed by India (87), which reports progress this year on closing the gender gap with regard to wage equality and across all indicators of the Educational Attainment, fully closing its primary and secondary education enrolment gender gaps. However, it also sees some regression on women's estimated earned income and continues to rank third-lowest in the world on Health and Survival, remaining the world's least-improved country on this over the past decade.

CONCLUSION:

Our participative democracy, in times to come, and with the efforts of both women and men, would be able to found solutions to the problem of gender inequality and would take us all towards our cherished dream of a truly modern society in both thought and action.

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