

Gender, Governance, and Inclusion

Introduction and Background

1. **Almost two decades after the landmark Beijing Platform for Action, an important question that continues to persist is whether enough has been achieved in the quest for gender equality during the intervening period.** The adoption of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, in 1979 by the United Nations, ratified by 187 countries, *the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* in 1995 and the *Millennium Development Goals (MDG)* in 2000 set the tone worldwide for the promotion of gender equality. These and other efforts have put gender equality firmly on the social, economic, and political development agenda of almost all countries. Gender equality and women's empowerment are today accepted as fundamental development objectives, crucial for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes (Box 1).

Gender equality has come a long way since the days of the Beijing Conference. One hundred and thirty six countries now have explicit guarantees for the equality of all citizens and non-discrimination between men and women in their constitutions. Notable achievements have been made in reducing gender gaps and affecting a dramatic improvement in the lives of women and girls. In 2014, on average, over 96% of the gender gap in health outcomes, 94% of the gap in educational attainment, 60% of the gap in economic participation and 21% of the gap in political empowerment has been closed. Women now represent more than 40% of the global labour force, 43% of agricultural labour force and more than half of the world's university students.

Sources: World Development Report 2012 on 'Gender Equality and Development'; The World Bank, The Global Gender Gap Report 2014; World Economic Forum.

Box 1: Gender Equality Has Come a Long Way

2. As the world shifts from the MDGs to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, it is important to remember that impressive as the progress may be, substantial and deep inequalities still persist in varying (and sometimes changed forms), even in domains where change has occurred. For instance, the Global Gender Gap Index 2014 ranked India at 114 out of 142 countries. In most cases, the statistics masks the significant inequalities that exist at a country-level, and often at the subnational level. The advent of globalisation and its effects have further exacerbated inequalities, particularly at the economic level. Lack of relevant skills and opportunities in an increasingly globalised world has also inequitably affected women, particularly in countries such as in South Asia where gender inequalities continue to persist in all areas. Liberalisation and growing trade resulted in increased value for scarce resources like land and natural resources. In many countries, women for the most part, do not have equal rights to such economic assets and they also lack political connections to influence public allocation. They cannot gain from the opportunities, further exacerbating inequalities. Such inequalities lead to vulnerability and weak resilience, particularly for women, given the

other embedded structural constraints, and place them and the gains of the past in a precarious condition.

3. **Gender inequalities incur significant costs for any country's development.** Rising inequalities impede poverty reduction and shape the opportunities of education and upward mobility of disadvantaged individuals, among whom women constitute a majority (OECD 2014). In countries where inequality has been high or rising, studies show for example that growth in consumption for the poorest 40 percent of the population has been slower than for the population as a whole (UNDP HDR 2014). Development literature also suggests that when countries, such as India, attain the status of Middle-Income Countries; inequalities grow unless there are strong corrective policies and measures.

Gender equality is a term that is interpreted differently by different people and cultures. For purposes of this conference, gender equality will be understood around the following framework:

Objective 1: To ensure women's access, ownership and control over resources and capabilities, to obtain their right to livelihoods, decent work, and social protection, including gender-responsive infrastructure and policies/programmes addressing women's unpaid work; and

Objective 2: To create and strengthen voice and agency of women in formal as well as informal institutions that is involved in decision-making on social, political and economic issues.

Objective 3: To ensure security and freedom from violence, particularly gender-based violence.

Source: Draft Gender Policy (2014), Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala

4. **Development policy is ostensibly concerned with resolving problems of poverty, unemployment, and deprivations.** However gender considerations in addressing these problems are not adequately recognised. Women's experiences with the development process as revealed by a number of studies and emerging evidence in the early 70s, national and international, were largely inimical to their needs and interests and sparked off a debate on issues surrounding women's rights - to gainful employment when they did not have it; to recognition of their substantial contribution (paid and unpaid) to the national economy and towards their families' survival; to adequate rewards to their labour they do not enjoy; and to a share of resources, benefits and decisions regarding development to which they are entitled as citizens of a country.

Objectives of the Kerala Gender Park

5. **Kerala represents this paradox.** On the one hand, gender disparities in education have declined; in fact women constitute the majority at certain tertiary levels. Maternal mortality and other traditional indicators of women's health have been addressed and reduced; in some areas the indicators are the best in the country and are similar to that of some developed nations. On the other hand, access to economic opportunities and resources, and equalising women's political voice have been difficult to achieve. Kerala today has low levels of participation of women in labour markets, and political voice in the state legislature (where there are no quotas) remains among the weakest in the country. There is also a growing concern that the decreasing female-male child ratios may also be an

early signal of this discrimination in the economic front, and the perception of the daughter as an economic burden.

6. **The Kerala Gender Park is planning a series of biennial international conferences that will help to find answers to some of the above concerns and share international good practices in addressing and stemming gender inequalities.** The focus of the first conference will be on gender inequalities and the need to find different ways of strengthening inclusion of women in the development process. The conference will invite papers on specific topics, and is expected to result in a publication. The **ICGE Statement 2015**, expected to be a result of the conference, will also detail an action plan based on the discussions and main findings at the conference sessions that will help advance gender equality through more effective inclusion of women in all spheres of life, and consistent with the more energetic directions that will be helpful as the sustainable development goals are framed for the post-2015 era.

Objectives & Nature of the Conference

7. **The November 2015 conference aims to assess where we stand today in terms of achieving gender equality, and focus on the way forward learning from the experiences of the past.** Gender-related exclusion and inequalities will be the main focus at the Conference. The Asian and Pacific ministerial declaration on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment (a UN Women and ESCAP organised Conference in November 2014) recognised that "gender-based discrimination occurs in and of itself and that it is often linked to other forms of inequality related to such factors as age, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, disability, class, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity, occupation, migrant and legal or other status, and that the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination can compound experiences of injustice, social marginalisation and oppression." Gender inequalities in its various complex and intractable forms will be discussed with an eye to the need to have stronger and more responsive policies, institutions, and programs.

8. **The conference Agenda and Sessions are organised around the analytical framework (Box 1).** Several questions will be discussed in each session. What has worked in addressing gender inequalities? In what contexts? What has not worked and why? What are the emerging lessons for states such as Kerala, which have made significant strides and now appear to be at a stage where the calculated gains of the past are at risk of deterioration? The various sessions are briefly described below.

9. **Persistent inequalities in women's work will be a key area of discussion.** The session will first focus on the trends and patterns of women's employment, which will set the context for the session. The session will also focus on the challenge of regulation of employment in the context of the importance of the informal sector as dynamic, different from the earlier understanding that it was a residual that must be incorporated into the organised sector. Linkages between Education/Skill development and Women's Employment – a theme of special importance to Kerala where women's education has

expanded but not their employment—will also be a subject of discussion. Given the importance of informality and the inequalities it generates, the session will also include a discussion on the alternative ways of 'organising' and collective bargaining by workers. The session will also provide space to review the challenges before the conventional forms of labour mobilisation in terms of the strategic collective bargaining and the challenges to them from newer contexts.

10. **The greatest strides have been made in terms of girls' education all over the developing world.** But the Gender Gap report warns that the advances are at risk of being lost. Even as market ideology in education presents itself as gender-neutral, evidence from a range of countries are pointing to its sharp gendered effects. Wide differentiation of institutional quality, along with shrinking employment opportunities particularly in the organised sector, have acted to complicate issues of educational equity and gender equality. Even as more women are accessing education, benefits are being reaped by women and men from privileged social groups. For the session on education, questions of gender equality and education will be located within new policy discourses of women's empowerment, the emergence of hierarchical, and often deeply unequal, typologies of education at all levels, and aspirations of young women accessing, or desiring access to, education to better their lives.

11. **While there has been much focus on maternal mortality, the unequal reproductive rights of women are often not effectively addressed.** The safety of women in her reproductive life and her lack of agency and choices, further get aggravated within the context of strong male child preference in Indian families. The constant reality of sexually expressed violence against women, the specter of abuse of women as surrogates for pregnancies, and the inextricable link between mental and physical health - all important issues in India - will be the focus of discussion at the session on health.

12. **The question of unequal citizenship of women will be the focus of another session.** Despite the large-scale induction of women into local development and politics around the world, there is increasing concern that this mode of development may have led to accelerating the feminisation of labour and to deteriorating working conditions. There is also the fear that many instruments of 'empowerment' and 'participation' of women may have trapped women in bureaucratic logic and public altruism. A number of questions arise for discussion at the session, including whether such modes of development have been in the interest of marginalised groups and the perceptions of those who choose not to go in- do they get discredited as troublemakers. Another issue relates to the reciprocal effects of the enlargement of the public space and the increasing permeability of boundaries between state and non-state institutions. A final dimension is the shifts in the human rights discourse internationally, and in feminist interventions at the international and national contexts, post-Beijing, to secure women's rights as human rights especially in a context in which women form a substantial part of the migrant worker population around the world. The

session will explore ways in which the above complexities have played out internationally as well as in the Indian context to generate insight on the subject and the way forward.

13. **The session on governance will open up a set of complex and problematic issues regarding the inclusion of women in the economic, social, and political development of a country.** It will focus on policies, institutions and practices that will try to understand the ways in which engendering governance and the process of democratisation speak with each other, and the resultant challenges and complexities at the regional, state and global levels. The session will focus on issues such as unravelling women's inclusion into the hitherto unavailable domain of 'formal politics' intersects and, often, intervenes with their existing alternate identities and concerns. How do these women, in the newfound locations of power in governance, negotiate with power structures in their local contexts? How, if at all done, such affirmative action alters the existing structures of governance? How do women's experiences as elected women representatives relate to existing discourses on gender and governance?

14. **Increasing or persistent gender inequalities have raised the importance of protecting the most vulnerable with effective social security programs.** While explicit discrimination in social security provisions such as those that make a woman's access to benefits dependent on her husband or lower pension ages for women are important, social security is more than a question of securing gender equality in the formal sense. Most women do not work long enough in the labour markets to benefit from social security benefits, mainly given their reproductive and caring roles, and end up being economically dependent on their husbands. Should social security also take into account gender roles in society, which cast a large part of the unpaid burden on women? Questions for the session will include how globalisation has contributed to the growing inequalities; lessons on gender in protecting the most vulnerable, and whether laws protect vulnerable women in a globalising world or help to increase inequalities.

15. **Finally, panel discussions will focus on three critical areas: disability, masculinities, and the role of media. The exclusion of people with disabilities is an important development issue, and a sub-theme of the citizenship debate.** The questions to be addressed in the first panel discussion include overcoming the challenges of disability and the importance of access to equal human development and employment, cultural barriers focusing on protecting, violence against women and people with disabilities. The second will focus on how masculinities are evolving, and how it can play a role in ensuring equality for both men and women. The third panel will focus on the role of media in supporting gender equality. It will discuss the portrayal of women in the media, in particular in India, and discuss the question whether it is day-to-day life events that influence portrayal of gender relationships in the media or vice versa.

16. **A tentative skeletal agenda for the workshop is provided as an attachment.** This will be updated over the following months. Eminent speakers from India and abroad are being invited to prepare and present papers.

Attachment 1: Conference Design

Plenary Sessions:

1. Plenary 1: **Positioning Kerala**
2. Plenary 2: **Exclusions: Caste, Ethnicity and Region**
3. Plenary 3: **Gender and Collective Bargaining: Emerging forms of labour mobilization**
4. Plenary 4: **Commercialisation of Health**
5. Plenary 5: **Entrepreneurship**

Parallel Sessions:

1. Work

- Trends and patterns of women's employment
- Gender and Informality in Employment
- Linkages between Education /Skill development and Women's Employment

2. Health

- Reproductive and sexual health rights of women /Infertility and Surrogacy
- Demographic Trends - Sex Ratio, Aging
- Mental health

3. Education

- Situating gender in education - Interrogating policies and their impact on access, retention, quality.
- Impact of Education on Women's Health, skills and employment and empowerment.
- Re-imagining women's education: Perspectives from movements and struggles

4. Governance

- Policies, Institutions and Practices
- Gender and Local Governance
- Engendering Governance Vs Civil Society, Market, Media and Political Parties

5. Citizenship

- Accessing Gender Justice against Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment
- Developmental Citizenship and Gender in Contemporary India and Kerala
- Questions of Citizenship in Gendered Migration for Work and in Transnational Family Life

6. Globalisation and Social Security

- Globalisation and growing inequalities
- Protecting the Poorest and Most Vulnerable in a Globalizing World - Policies Matter (to be developed)
- Exacerbating Gender Inequalities- Equal Laws and Unequal Outcomes

Panel Discussions:

- Disability: Changing the Power Equation
- Masculinities: Gender equality is not a Women's issue
- Media: Image of Women in the Media

Conference Outputs

- **ICGE Statement** 2015 that will serve as a guide to governments, NGOs and civil society, private sector and media to act on and promote gender equality.
- ICGE-1 Publication (vol.1 of the ICGE Series- editorial plus +compilation of all the papers)