



Gender-Sensitive Policy Making

This editorial is based on “[Gender sensitive policing needed](#)” which was published in Hindustan Times on 29/12/2024. The article highlights the Madras High Court’s criticism of the Tamil Nadu Police in the Anna University case highlights gaps in gender-sensitive policing, with victim-blaming and privacy violations reflecting broader issues of gender sensitization and female representation in law enforcement.

For Prelims: [The Economic Survey 2023-2024](#), [Labour Force Participation Rate \(LFPR\)](#), [Gender Gap Index](#), [STEM \(science, technology, engineering, and mathematics\)](#), [18th Lok Sabha](#), [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\) 2023](#), [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), [Indian Constitution](#), [Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), [Gender Budgeting](#), [Union Budget 2024-25](#), [National Statistical Office \(NSO\)](#), [Mudra](#).

For Mains: Significance of Gender-Sensitive Policy Making for Gender Equality, and Addressing Issues Related to Women.

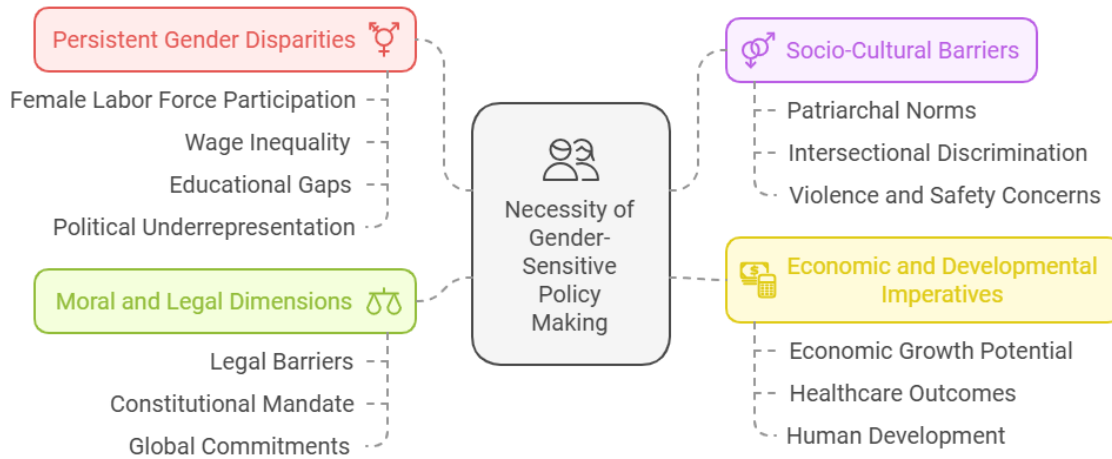
Gender-sensitive policy making recognizes and addresses the specific and often unequal impacts of policies on different genders, especially in societies where historical and systemic inequalities persist. In India, the urgency for such policies has been highlighted by incidents like the Anna University sexual assault case, where **institutional insensitivity** exacerbated the trauma faced by survivors. The failure to provide adequate support and **justice** reflects broader societal challenges, underscoring the critical need for a transformative approach. **Gender-sensitive policies** not only aim to rectify immediate disparities but also work as **foundational tools** for achieving sustainable **socio-economic and cultural equity** over time by creating **equitable frameworks**.

Why is Gender-Sensitive Policy Making Necessary?

- **Persistent Gender Disparities:**
 - **Female Labor Force Participation:** [The Economic Survey 2023-2024](#) observes that the female [Labour Force Participation Rate \(LFPR\)](#) rose to **37%** in 2022-2023 from **23.3%** in 2017-2018 which is relatively below global and regional benchmarks such as China’s 61.5%.
 - This restricts **women’s economic independence** and undermines national productivity.
 - **Wage Inequality:** As per the [Gender Gap Index](#), India’s economic parity stands at **39.8%**, meaning women earn **Rs 39.8** for every **Rs 100** earned by men. However, India has closed **64.1%** of its **gender gap** in 2024.
 - The [wage gap](#) devalues women's work, leading to economic dependency and limiting investment in **education, healthcare, and development**.
 - **Educational Gaps:** Despite significant progress in improving [literacy rates](#) among

women, systemic barriers persist that hinder girls from accessing higher education.

- Also, despite India producing the highest percentage of women **STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)** graduates globally (40%), their representation in STEM jobs remains low at just **14%**, according to the CSIR report 2022.
- Factors such as **poverty**, inadequate **infrastructure in rural areas**, and societal norms that prioritize male education over female, exacerbating gender inequities.
- **Political Underrepresentation:** In the **18th Lok Sabha**, 74 women were elected, making up **13.6%** of the total, a slight decrease from 78 women (14.4%) in the **17th Lok Sabha**, reflecting their marginal presence in the nation's highest decision-making body.
 - This underrepresentation in politics leads to inadequate advocacy for **women-centric policies** and diminishes the diversity of perspectives needed for comprehensive governance.
- **Socio-Cultural Barriers:**
 - **Patriarchal Norms:** Deep-rooted **patriarchal attitudes** constrain women's mobility, decision-making power, and access to critical resources.
 - For example, around 47% of Indian women report having a say in **household financial decisions**, illustrating the pervasive nature of gendered power imbalances within families and communities.
 - **Intersectional Discrimination:** Women from marginalized communities, such as Dalits and Muslims, face **compounded challenges** that intertwine gender, caste, and religious biases.
 - For instance, according to the **2011 Census**, the worker population ratio of Muslims was 32.6, while Hindus and Christians had a ratio of 41 and 41.9, respectively.
 - **Violence and Safety Concerns:** The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2023** report reveals a troubling **4% rise** in crimes against women in India in 2022, including cases of cruelty, abductions, assaults, and sexual assaults.
 - Many cases go unreported due to societal stigma, lack of trust in the justice system, and fear of retribution, worsening abuse and vulnerability.
- **Economic and Developmental Imperatives**
 - **Economic Growth Potential:** It is estimated that enabling women's equal participation in the economy could boost India's 2025 **GDP** by **16%**, adding \$700 billion and increasing growth by 1.4 percentage points.
 - Realizing this potential requires targeted interventions to **eliminate barriers** preventing women from participating fully in the economy.
 - **Healthcare Outcomes:** Gender-sensitive health care policies have proven effective in improving maternal and child health outcomes.
 - India's **maternal mortality ratio** is 97 per 100,000 live births, and targeted initiatives could further reduce this and ensure equitable healthcare access.
 - **Human Development:** Addressing gender inequities is fundamental to achieving the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **Goal 5**, which emphasizes gender equality as a cornerstone for sustainable development.
- **Moral and Legal Dimension**
 - **Legal Barrier:** A significant legal barrier is the absence of **gender-sensitive policing**, which perpetuates injustice.
 - The **Madras High Court's** criticism of the Tamil Nadu Police for victim-blaming in the Anna University assault case emphasizes the urgent need for reform in law enforcement practices.
 - **Constitutional Mandate:** **Articles 14, 15, 16, 39(d), 42** of the **Indian Constitution** explicitly guarantee **equality before the law** and **prohibit discrimination** based on gender and **social security** to women.
 - Ensuring compliance with these provisions is a fundamental responsibility of governance.
 - **Global Commitments:** As a signatory to international conventions like the Convention on the **Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, India is obligated to adopt and implement policies that promote gender equity and protect women's rights.



What Major Steps have been Taken Towards Gender-Sensitive Policy Making?

▪ Legislative Framework

- **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017:** [Maternity leave](#) has been increased from 12 to 26 weeks for better postnatal care, and creche facilities are now mandatory in workplaces with over 50 employees to support women's workforce participation.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013:** Mandated the formation of [Internal Complaints Committees \(ICCs\)](#) in organizations to provide a formal mechanism for addressing workplace grievances related to sexual harassment.
- **Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013:** Introduced **stricter punishments** for crimes such as sexual assault and stalking, signaling a strong commitment to combating [gender-based violence](#).
- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:** Aimed to [eradicate child marriages](#) by imposing legal penalties and promoting awareness, particularly in rural and marginalized communities where the practice remains prevalent.

▪ Government Initiatives

- **Gender Budgeting:** Introduced in India in 2005-06, [gender budgeting](#) is a critical tool for integrating gender perspectives into policy and resource allocation.
 - The [Union Budget 2024-25](#) allocated over **Rs. 3 lakh crore** for schemes benefiting women and girls, aiming to promote women-led development.
 - Also, ministries and departments have established **Gender Budget Cells** to monitor expenditure and assess its impact on women.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** Focused on improving the sex ratio at birth, which increased from 918 in 2014-15 to 934 in 2019-20, highlighting its impact on challenging cultural preferences for male children.
 - Integrated efforts across ministries to ensure **girls' access to education, healthcare, and nutrition**, the [National Statistical Office \(NSO\)](#) reports that **12.6%** of students in India drop out of school, with **19.8%** discontinuing at the secondary level and **17.5%** at the upper primary level.
- **Schemes Prioritising Women :** Various government schemes like [MGNREGA](#), [Ujjwala Yojana](#), and [Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana](#) prioritize women's empowerment by offering preferential access to jobs, financial aid, healthcare, and energy, aiming to enhance women's economic independence, health, and overall well-being.
 - For instance, 63.6% of the total **Mudra** beneficiaries in the financial year 2023-24 were [women entrepreneurs](#).
 - Also, The [One Stop Centre Scheme](#) offers integrated services to women affected by violence, including medical, legal, psychological, and police assistance. The **Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)** provides training and employment opportunities for women's economic empowerment.
- **Encouraging Participation in R&D:** The [Gender Advancement for Transforming](#)

Institutions (GATI) program and **Biotechnology Career Advancement and Re-orientation (BioCARE) scheme** promote women's participation in research and development by providing career development opportunities, research grants, and fellowships in **STEM** and **biotechnology**.

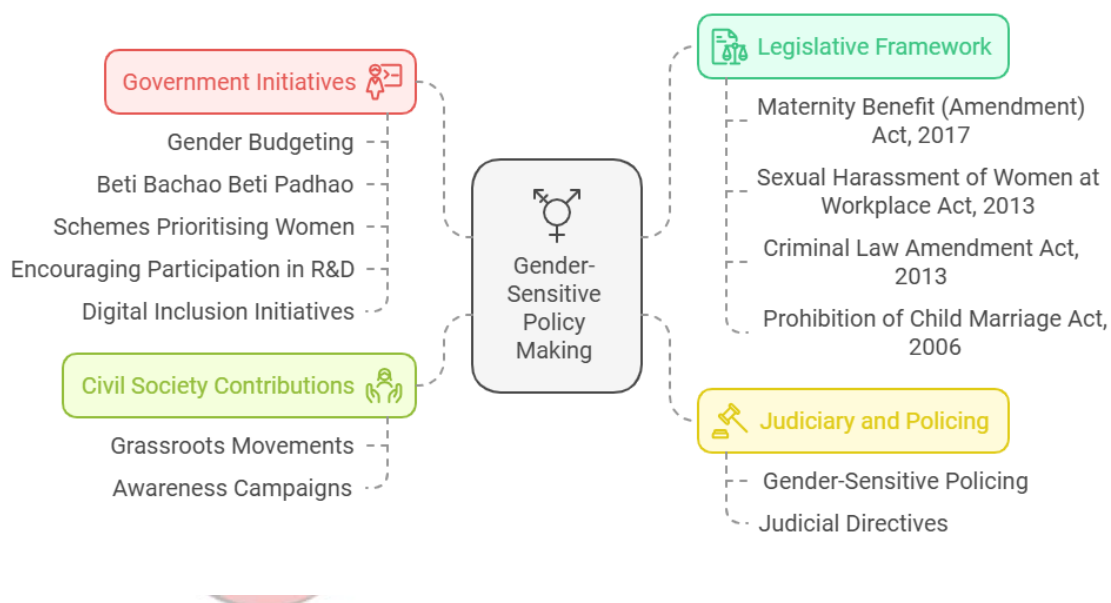
- **Digital Inclusion Initiatives:** **PMGDISHA** targeted women in underserved regions, offering digital payment training and e-governance modules to enhance their financial and civic participation.

▪ **Judiciary and Policing**

- **Gender-Sensitive Policing:** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee** on the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** recommended that the MHA advise states and UTs to establish at least **one all-women police station** in each district.
 - Gender-sensitization training for police personnel aims to improve their understanding of gender issues and ensure empathetic handling of cases involving women.
- **Judicial Directives:** **Supreme Court** guidelines mandate **gender sensitization** in workplaces and educational institutions, promoting awareness and fostering inclusive environments.
 - Also, the **Supreme Court of India** has come up with **a handbook to correct gender stereotypes** and guide judges on avoiding harmful stereotypes, especially about women, in judicial decisions and writing.

▪ **Civil Society Contributions**

- **Grassroots Movements:** **NGOs** such as **SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association)** advocate for **labor rights**, **social security**, and **financial inclusion** for women in the informal sector, ensuring their voices are represented in policy discussions.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Community-based programs addressing menstrual health, domestic violence, and economic literacy have empowered women to challenge societal norms and demand equitable treatment.



What Should be Way Forward For Gender-Sensitive Policy Making?

- **Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms:** Expand the scope of Gender Budget Cells in ministries to ensure systematic planning and allocation of resources for gender-specific programs.
 - Conduct regular **audits** to assess the **effectiveness and impact of budgetary allocations** on improving women's lives.
- **Implement Women's Reservation Act:** Expedite the implementation of the **Nari Shakti Vandan Act** to ensure **33%** representation of women in legislative bodies, thereby enhancing their participation in governance and policy formulation.
- **Workplace Equality:** Enforce strict compliance with **equal pay laws** and incentivize

organizations to adopt diversity benchmarks for gender representation across all levels of employment.

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Implement real-time tracking systems for **gender-disaggregated** data across sectors, enabling evidence-based policy making and evaluation.
 - Conduct comprehensive time-use surveys to quantify and recognize the economic value of unpaid care work predominantly performed by women.
- **Education and Awareness:** Incorporate **gender studies** into school curricula to foster early awareness and sensitivity among students regarding gender equality.
 - Launch nationwide campaigns addressing stigma around issues such as sexual violence and reproductive rights, encouraging open dialogue and societal acceptance.
- **Digital Empowerment:** Provide targeted outreach programs to train women in cybersecurity and data literacy, bridging the **digital divide** and enabling access to online education and financial services.
 - Expand training programs in **STEM** fields to encourage women's participation in these high-growth sectors.
- **E-Governance for Grievance Redressal:** Develop user-friendly digital platforms for reporting gender-based violence, ensuring anonymity, and enabling swift redressal mechanisms.
- **Learning from Global Best Practices:** In 2014, **Sweden** adopted the world's first explicitly feminist foreign policy, integrating a gender perspective into all decision-making processes, which could be aligned with India's socio-political context.
 - Countries like Canada, France, and Mexico have since implemented similar policies, underscoring the transformative power of gender-inclusive governance.

Conclusion

Gender-sensitive policy making is not merely a governance tool but a socio-economic necessity. While India has made commendable strides through **progressive legislations** and initiatives, bridging systemic gaps demands continuous efforts. By addressing **structural barriers** and fostering **inclusive frameworks**, gender equity can be transformed from an ideal to a reality, ensuring justice, dignity, and sustainable development for all.

Drishti Mains Question:

What are the key socio-economic and cultural disparities faced by women in India, and how can gender-sensitive policy making address these challenges.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. Which of the following gives 'Global Gender Gap Index' ranking to the countries of the world? (2017)

- (a) World Economic Forum
- (b) UN Human Rights Council
- (c) UN Women
- (d) World Health Organization

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. Women empowerment in India needs gender budgeting. What are the requirements and status of gender budgeting in the Indian context?(2016)

Q. How does patriarchy impact the position of middle class working women in India?(2014)

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