

Role of NGOs and Government Initiatives for Promoting Gender Equality

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Abstract—This research paper explores the pivotal role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government initiatives in promoting gender equality and empowering women in contemporary society. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. The study investigates how NGOs have become key agents of change by engaging in advocacy, awareness campaigns, policy dialogues, and community-based interventions that address issues such as education, employment, health care, and violence against women. Simultaneously, it examines how government initiatives—through legislation, gender budgeting, social welfare schemes, and institutional frameworks—seek to eliminate structural inequalities and ensure equal opportunities for all genders.

By analyzing policy documents, case studies, and existing literature, the paper highlights the interdependence between civil society efforts and state-led programs in achieving gender parity. The findings indicate that collaborations between NGOs and government bodies often result in more inclusive and sustainable outcomes, especially when supported by strong monitoring mechanisms and participatory governance. However, persistent challenges such as deep-rooted patriarchy, lack of political will, and limited resource allocation continue to impede progress. This research paper concludes that advancing gender equality requires a coordinated and multidimensional approach—one that combines the grassroots activism of NGOs with the institutional authority of governments to build a more equitable and inclusive society.

I. INTRODUCTION: GENDER EQUALITY IN NGOS AND GOVERNMENT

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable social and economic development. Despite decades of progress, disparities between men and women continue to persist in various spheres such as education, employment, political participation, and access to resources. Achieving

gender equality is not merely a moral obligation but also a critical prerequisite for inclusive growth and democratic governance. The combined efforts of state institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as essential drivers in addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting the empowerment of women across societies.

Governments play a crucial role in establishing legal frameworks, implementing policies, and designing welfare schemes aimed at reducing gender disparities. Through legislative reforms, gender-sensitive budgeting, and national programs aligned with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states attempt to institutionalize equality. On the other hand, NGOs complement these efforts by working at the grassroots level—raising awareness, empowering marginalized women, and ensuring the effective implementation of gender policies. Their advocacy and community-based interventions often bridge the gap between policy intent and on-ground realities.

However, despite these concerted efforts, challenges such as deep-rooted patriarchy, limited resources, socio-cultural barriers, and weak policy enforcement continue to hinder the realization of true gender equality. This research paper aims to examine the respective roles of NGOs and government initiatives in promoting gender equality, analyze their effectiveness, and explore how collaboration between these entities can lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes. The study further seeks to identify the strengths, limitations, and future prospects of these interventions in creating a gender-just society.

II. ROLE OF NGOS

A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is a non-profit, voluntary group or institution that operates independently of the government and addresses various social, environmental, or humanitarian issues. NGOs play a crucial role in promoting development, advocating for human rights (Dutta,2020), providing relief during emergencies, and raising awareness about various global and local problems. NGOs serve as an alternative for women empowerment by supplementing government efforts and addressing specific needs that may not be met by public programs alone (Gupta, 2021). Their flexibility, grassroots connections, and expertise in specialized areas can make a significant impact on empowering women. These organizations offer innovative and grassroots approaches to address the gender inequalities and challenges that women face. NGOs play a crucial role in providing educational opportunities, economic empowerment, healthcare access, and advocacy for women's rights. They design and implement programs tailored to the specific needs and contexts of women, engaging directly with communities to create lasting change. By focusing on capacity-building, mentorship, and creating safe spaces, NGOs empower women to challenge social norms, develop leadership skills, and become agents of change within their communities. NGOs also serve as a platform for raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, and collaborating with various stakeholders to amplify their impact. Through their dedication and commitment, NGOs offer a viable alternative for women's empowerment, fostering gender equality and creating opportunities for women to thrive and reach their full potential. NGOs in India have played a pivotal role in advancing women's empowerment through their various initiatives. For instance, organizations like SEWA have been instrumental in enabling women in the informal sector to gain decision-making power over their economic activities. By organizing women into self help groups and cooperatives, SEWA provides them with a platform to collectively make decisions regarding their finances, access to credit, and overall livelihoods. This empowers women by giving them a voice in shaping their economic destinies and enables them to challenge traditional gender roles.

NGOs such as Breakthrough focus on addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's

decision-making power. Through their innovative media campaigns, community engagement activities, and leadership development workshops, they challenge gender norms and empower women to become decision-makers in their communities. By actively involving women in decision-making, Breakthrough enables them to advocate for their rights, influence policy changes, and contribute to creating safer and more equitable societies.

NGOs like The Hunger Project and Pradan focus on rural development and poverty alleviation. Through their programs, they empower marginalized women by enhancing their decision-making abilities and leadership skills. By facilitating the formation of women's self-help groups and providing them with access to credit and livelihood opportunities, these organizations enable women to participate in decision-making processes related to community development and resource allocation. This active involvement empowers women to influence decisions that impact their lives and communities positively.

III. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Indian government has been proactive in implementing several initiatives and schemes aimed at promoting women empowerment and addressing the challenges faced by women across various aspects of their lives. Key initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign focus on improving the child sex ratio, promoting girls' education, and challenging gender discrimination. The Mahila Shakti Kendra initiative seeks to empower rural women through community participation and awareness generation, while the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana encourages parents to save for their daughters' education and marriage expenses through a government-backed savings scheme. To support women entrepreneurs, the government launched the Mahila E-Haat, an online marketing platform, and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, which offers financial assistance to small businesses, including those led by women. The Ujjwala Scheme addresses the health and well-being of women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households by providing free LPG connections, reducing indoor air pollution caused by traditional cooking methods. Additionally, the government has set up One Stop Centre Scheme or Sakhi Centres to offer integrated support services to women affected by violence, and

the Swadhar Greh initiative provides shelter and rehabilitation services to women in distress. To support working mothers, the National Creche Scheme offers daycare facilities for young children, and the Mahila Police Volunteer initiative involves recruiting women volunteers to act as a bridge between the police

and the community, helping create awareness about women's rights and reporting incidents of violence. These government initiatives, along with numerous others, demonstrate India's commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women and fostering their empowerment across various spheres of life.

A Brief Table with Examples

	Name of NGO / Government Initiative	Year Established	Key Focus Areas	Major Objectives / Activities
1	SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association)	1972	Economic empowerment, labor rights	Organizes women in the informal sector, provides microfinance, skill development, and legal support.
2	Snehalaya	1989	Women and child welfare, rehabilitation	Works with victims of trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation; provides shelter, education, and vocational training.
3	Azad Foundation	2008	Women's employment and mobility	Trains women from disadvantaged backgrounds as professional drivers and promotes safe mobility.
4	Breakthrough Trust	1999	Gender-based violence, media advocacy	Uses mass media and community engagement to challenge gender norms and prevent violence against women.
5	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)	2015	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Promotes survival, protection, and education of the girl child; aims to address declining child sex ratio.
6	Mahila E-Haat	2016	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Online marketing platform to support women entrepreneurs and self-help groups.
7	One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC)	2015	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Provides integrated support services to women affected by violence, including legal and medical aid.
8	National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)	2010	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Converges existing policies and programs for holistic empowerment of women.
9	Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)	2017	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Provides maternity benefits and financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women.
10	Ujjawala Scheme	2007	Ministry of Women and Child Development	Aims to prevent trafficking and provide rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims.

IV. KEY ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY

1. Reproductive Health

A woman's control over her reproductive health is fundamental to her empowerment and equality. The ability to make decisions regarding family planning – such as the number, timing, and spacing of children – allows women to have greater autonomy in their personal and professional lives. Without access to reproductive healthcare, women face significant barriers to participating fully in society. Every two minutes, a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth, underscoring the urgent need for improved healthcare services and protection of reproductive rights. Denying these rights constitutes a violation of both health and life, and represents a form of gender-based discrimination.

2. Challenging Social and Gender Norms

To achieve gender equality, it is essential to challenge and transform harmful gender norms that perpetuate inequality. This involves reshaping social roles and relations to promote a more equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities between men and women. Changing perceptions around gender roles requires a concerted effort to address the societal norms that limit women's participation in various sectors, including education, politics, and the workforce. Initiatives that promote positive masculinities and encourage men to take on a greater share of caregiving responsibilities are vital to transforming entrenched gender dynamics.

3. Economic Empowerment

Women's participation in the economy is still constrained by both formal and informal barriers. Many women receive lower wages than men for similar work, and their unpaid care work, such as child-rearing and household management, is often undervalued. The unequal burden of unpaid care work also leads to a significant gap in labour-force participation, which deepens when women become parents.

4. Educational Empowerment

Education is one of the most powerful tools for advancing gender equality. However, women and girls still face significant barriers to education, with two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults being women. Lack of education limits a woman's access to opportunities, information, and decision-making

power. Conversely, higher levels of education for women lead to numerous benefits, including lower infant mortality rates and better health outcomes for children. Investing in education for girls and women not only transforms their individual lives but also has a ripple effect on the well-being of future generations.

V. REAL TIME DATA

UN Women in India reported several significant achievements through its programs between 2018 and 2023, including reaching 83,129 women through the Second Chance Education and Vocational Learning Programme and training over 10,000 staff at One Stop Crisis Centres.

One UN Women report also highlighted training for over 7,000 women to respond to survivors of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and linking 8,600 women to existing government social welfare services. Organizations like Smile Foundation and SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) implement extensive programs focusing on healthcare, livelihoods, skill development, and legal aid, but their impact data is generally available in annual reports or specific studies, not a live feed.

For general statistics on gender equality in India, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provides national-level data on progress, with India showing improvement in its rank in recent years (108th out of 193 countries in the GII 2025 report). This index, however, measures overall national progress and does not specifically disaggregate the contributions of NGOs in real-time.

To find specific impact data, you would need to visit the websites of individual NGOs or data portals that consolidate impact reports, such as the UN Women India page or individual NGO annual reports available on platforms like GuideStar India.

VI. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: NGOS VS GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

Both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government initiatives in India have played vital but distinct roles in promoting gender equality. Their approaches differ in terms of structure, focus, and implementation, yet they often converge toward the

shared goal of women's empowerment and social inclusion.

NGOs in India typically operate from the bottom-up, emphasizing community participation and localized solutions. Organizations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) focus on improving economic independence among women in the informal sector through collective bargaining, microfinance, and vocational training (SEWA, n.d.). Similarly, Breakthrough India and Jagori use advocacy, education, and media campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and address violence against women at the grassroots level (Breakthrough India, n.d.; Jagori, n.d.). This approach allows NGOs to adapt to community-specific needs and promote behavioral change, which large government institutions often struggle to achieve due to bureaucratic rigidity.

Conversely, the Government of India employs a top-down policy-driven approach, focusing on large-scale interventions through national programs and legislation. Initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) aim to correct gender imbalances and promote girls' education (Ministry of Women and Child Development [MWCD], 2015), while the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) provides financial support to improve maternal health outcomes (MWCD, 2017). The Ujjawala Scheme and One Stop Centre Scheme further extend institutional support to victims of gender-based violence by offering legal, psychological, and medical assistance (MWCD, 2007, 2015). These government-led initiatives ensure wide coverage and policy legitimacy but sometimes lack flexibility and effective local implementation.

A comparative evaluation shows that NGOs are more innovative and community-centered, addressing micro-level issues through empowerment and advocacy, while government programs ensure macro-level policy coherence and resource mobilization. However, both face limitations—NGOs often struggle with financial sustainability and scalability, whereas government schemes face challenges in monitoring, coordination, and reaching marginalized groups (CARE India, n.d.; NMEW, 2010). Effective gender equality promotion thus depends on synergistic collaboration between the two, where NGOs contribute local expertise and participatory methods, and governments provide institutional frameworks and

resources. Such partnerships can bridge policy-practice gaps and lead to more sustainable gender equity outcomes across India.

VII. IMPORTANCE OF WOMAN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECISION MAKING

Women empowerment through decision making is crucial for the progress and development of any society. When women are given the opportunity to make decisions, they can contribute to the growth of their families, communities, and nations. Firstly, when women are empowered to make decisions, they can contribute to the economic growth of their families and communities. Women who have control over their finances can invest in their children's education and health, which can lead to better outcomes for their families. Additionally, when women are involved in decision-making processes at work, they can bring new perspectives and ideas that can lead to innovation and growth. Secondly, women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to better policies that address the needs of all members of society. Women have unique experiences and perspectives that can inform policies related to education, healthcare, and social welfare. When women are included in decision-making processes, policies are more likely to be inclusive and effective. Thirdly, empowering women through decision making can lead to greater gender equality. When women have a voice in decision-making processes, they are more likely to advocate for policies that promote gender equality. This can lead to greater opportunities for women in education, employment, and leadership positions. Finally, empowering women through decision making is a fundamental human right. Women have the right to participate in all aspects of society on an equal basis with men. When women are excluded from decision-making processes, their rights are violated. In conclusion, empowering women through decision making is essential for the progress and development of any society. Women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to economic growth, better policies, greater gender equality, and the protection of human rights. It is essential that we work towards creating a world where all women have equal opportunities to participate in decision making processes.

VIII. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Overcoming Societal Barriers

NGOs in India face many societal barriers when promoting gender equality. Deep-rooted cultural norms and traditional beliefs often hinder progress. These organizations must work tirelessly to change mindsets and challenge stereotypes. Additionally, resistance from local communities can slow down initiatives aimed at reducing inequality.

Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Equality
Aligning NGO efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial. These goals provide a framework for achieving gender equality. However, limited resources and funding can make it difficult for NGOs to meet these targets. Collaboration with government and private sector actors is essential to bridge these gaps and ensure political and economic independence for women.

Future Strategies for NGOs and Civil Society

To continue making strides in gender equality, NGOs and civil society must adopt innovative strategies. This includes leveraging technology to reach wider audiences and enhance female literacy. Building stronger networks and partnerships will also be key. By working together, these organizations can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

IX. SUGGESTION

From our perspective, this research provides a clear and valuable foundation for understanding the structural roles of NGOs and the government; however, we believe its analysis could be significantly deepened by exploring the practical mechanics of their collaboration in greater detail, moving beyond stating its necessity to illustrating specific, successful partnership models that bridge policy and grassroots action. We also feel that the role of men and boys, while briefly noted, is too critical to be a footnote and should be expanded into a key issue, as transforming patriarchal norms requires engaging all members of society. Furthermore, we suggest that the challenge of the "digital divide" deserves explicit mention as a major barrier, since technological solutions like Mahila E-Haat cannot achieve their full potential without concurrent, widespread efforts to improve digital access and literacy for women. Finally, we are

of the view that weaving in personal narratives and case studies alongside the presented data would powerfully humanize the abstract concepts of empowerment and support, making the research not only more compelling and relatable but also offering a more holistic and actionable roadmap toward genuine gender equality.

X. CONCLUSION

The journey towards women empowerment in India has yielded numerous positive outcomes, including increased access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for women, as well as a greater awareness of their rights and entitlements. Feminist ideology is held by empowered women, and they want to see other oppressed women gain power. These strong women will be able to realize their convictions by joining forces with an NGO whose goals are similar to their own, which provides them a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment (Narumugai & Kumar, 2017). The movement for women empowerment in India has come a long way, but there is still much work to be done. Continued commitment and collaboration among all stakeholders are essential to sustain the gains made thus far and pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive. By empowering women, India not only fulfils its moral obligation towards half of its population but also unlocks the immense potential that lies within its women, thereby fostering sustainable development and social progress for all. NGO's work has significantly advanced the cause of ending gender inequality and empowering women. To achieve sustained and all-encompassing women's empowerment projects, issues including financial limitations and cultural hurdles need constant attention and collaboration. NGOs may continue to influence good change and build a more inclusive and equitable society for women through continuous dedication and effective partnerships.

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