Bridging the Gender Parity Gap

Why in news?

In the recently released Global Gender Gap index by WEF for 2021, India falls 28 spots and is placed at 140th position.

What does the report say?

- The Index has four pillars- education attainment, health, political empowerment and economic participation.
- In Asia region, only Pakistan and Afghanistan are behind India.
- India has suffered mainly in political empowerment and economic participation.
- India fell from 18 to 51 in political empowerment of women, despite women having a great opportunity to get better participation in political decision-making.
- As against a global average of 50%, India has just 12 %participation, which clearly is an issue of political will, as local self-government body elections have shown good participation.
- The labour participation of women is 22%, one of the lowest in the world (comparable countries have 50%).
- Educational attainment and economic participation are closely linked and the gender gap issue in India is stark here.
- The big drop in enrolment of girls in primary (93%), secondary (62%) and tertiary (29%) education which sis alarming.
- The pandemic has affected more women than men.

What does the report suggest?

- The global GDP could rise by as much as $28 trillion by 2025 if women play an equal role to men in labour markets.
- If both domestic and MNCs businesses join hands with the government to close the gender gap in economic empowerment, so that India could add at least a trillion annually to its GDP by 2029.
- Companies with more women representation have achieved 22 % higher productivity, 40% better customer retention and 27% more profitability.
- Giving due recognition to the informal and vulnerable sections of the

labour market and investing in them can make changes for the women workforce.

- There is a need for policies in sectors where women participation is significant- healthcare, IT, education, agriculture and also in emerging areas like artificial intelligence, block chain.
- Skill India should develop programmes for girls/women and address the systemic and behavioural issues.

What more can be done now?

- In the last few years India has several schemes devised— from Skill India, Make in India to Atmanirbhar and Beti Padhao.
- The schemes must be implemented in true spirit, allocated budgets for the schemes should be spent fully and district collectors needs to be held accountable. (Nirbhaya fund was seriously under-utilised.)
- Start-up India must develop schemes to build an ecosystem for women entrepreneurs to thrive and encourage PPP.
- A renewed thrust on innovation that focus on promotion of innovations by women, support to innovations for the underprivileged etc. should be encouraged.
- Due recognition should be given to businesses that contribute to the national gender parity goals.
- Enterprises must embrace policies for inclusion that help women progress in career, up-skilling, return-to-career schemes, flexi-work, special leave, wage parity, hybrid working models.
- An independent authority like the UIDAI for gender parity should be created that can be the nodal agency for scaling-up at district levels with clear objectives, metrics, targets and good governance.
- It can address a multitude of areas like education, skilling, safety, transparency in informal sector labour participation, wage parity, and women business opportunities.
- Every organisation should establish and track pre-decided common metrics derived from the national priorities.
- For example, start with four major metrics such as percentage of women in leadership positions, diversity ratio adherence, pay parity and culture adherence.
- The CSR funds should be channelized towards localised women community engagement and skilling which could be done in partnership with district administrations.
- The government needs to be lobbied to add women-specific work as a key

CSR focus and policy-makers needs to be influence for gender equality policies.

- Closing the gender gap will take 100 years at the current rate but will need urgent focus and clear accountability for the policies, laws, schemes.

Source: Business Line

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