



## GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND SDGs POLICY BRIEF I



# SDG 5

# GENDER EQUALITY:

## GAPS, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

## Improving Pakistan's low ranking on gender equality and empowerment: The way forward

Ever wondered what is behind Pakistan's low ranking on all indices of gender equality? We know patriarchal societies place women at a disadvantage. We also know that South Asia suffers from women's low labour force participation rates, and disadvantages in health, education, and employment. But have we ever wondered about ranking methodologies and what needs to be corrected at the international level? This brief provides practical steps to address key concerns at the international and national levels.

Acknowledging that the government must invest more in women's empowerment both as a human rights issue and as an economic issue, here we focus on challenges that the UN's Statistics Division (UNSD) faces and what Pakistan can do to make its assessment fairer.

## Data Inclusion and Exclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals come with 169 targets and 232 indicators. The SDG 5 on Gender Equality comes with 14 indicators but given that it is a crosscutting theme, there are a total of 83 gender relevant indicators across the SDGs. In 2019, half of the UN member states cited significant data gaps in their reports, meaning that national statistical surveys could not provide all the required data for monitoring the SDG's progress, particularly for social and environmental indicators. The UNSD can only rely upon data which is standardised, so that it is comparable across countries and time, and importantly, free of gender biases. Alternatives have been discussed but reliance upon private sector, NGOs, and universities for data raises concerns about privacy, comparability, and continuity across time. More resources need to be committed to ensure data collection and measurement at the official level.

The UN's Sustainable Development Report (SDR) created a two-tier criterion for indicators in December 2020. Tier 1 indicators (130 in number) are conceptually clear, have an internationally established methodology, and data is regularly produced for at least 50 percent countries where the indicator is relevant. Tier 2 indicators (97 in number) are conceptually clear, but data is not regularly produced by the member countries.



For the SDG 5, only four indicators are Tier 1 indicators and 10 are Tier 2 indicators. The four Tier 1 Indicators are:

1. Indicator 5.3.1 proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married in a union before age 15 and before age 18;
2. Indicator 5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age;
3. Indicator 5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local government;
4. Indicator 5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions.

The SDR acknowledges that SDG 5 has two significant data gaps: violence against women (VAW) and the gender pay-gap. Furthermore, indicator 5.5.2 (women in managerial positions) only considers women's presence at the top management level in private firms, not junior, and middle level, nor in the public sector, where quotas have been instituted in many countries including Pakistan. Women's unpaid care work is not accounted for either. Available national level data is only relevant if 50 percent countries provide the same data, therefore, progress on any indicator is not fairly reflected if it is not provided by at least 92 out of 193 UN SDG Member States. Pakistan has data for some Tier 2 Indicators such as Indicator 5.1 (legal frameworks) and partial data for Indicator 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 (breakdowns by forms of violence, age group and frequency etc. are not available). The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) data which shows that VAW has decreased in the country between 2014 and 2018, has not considered as a total of 92 states do not report it. Equally importantly, gender is a fluid concept, but the SDGs restrict it to biologically determined male and female, missing out on large numbers of transgender people who are marginalised.

## Data Issues in Pakistan

Pakistan was ranked 151 out of 153 on gender equality in 2021 by the World Economic Forum. Pakistan's overall ranking on the SDGs is 129 out of 193. While Pakistan faces resource scarcity and unequal resource distribution, the data issues weaken its position. Below is a synopsis of data challenges in Pakistan:

- Changed structure, content and length of existing household surveys make data incomparable across years.
- Data exists but is not reported by a national statistical source, this may or may not raise doubt about the credibility and quality of data being reported by external sources.
- Collecting data on some indicators is deemed unnecessary due to lack of capacity and understanding regarding the importance of data.
- Data is partially available or is not available for the entire age range required, or as per the indicator definition (e.g., data on physical violence (indicator 5.2.1) data is available but sexual or psychological violence data is not available).
- Data is not reported regularly by national statistical sources.
- Data is not collected at the relevant national, provincial, and district.

### Availability of Data for 83 Gender-related Indicators Across the 17 SDGs

Indicator	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan	Pakistan Administered Kashmir	Gilgit-Baltistan	Pakistan
Full/Partial Data Availability for 83 Gender-related SDGs indicators	44	55	64	37	28	45	52



## Concerns about the Ranking Methodology

The SDGs are measured as a whole, meaning all goals receive equal importance. However, given the interdependence of some goals, the impacts for some countries can be negative, while for others they can be positive. For example, Goal 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production, Goal 13 - Climate Action, Goal 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions demonstrate that the countries which consume more resources and pollute the world more are not penalised proportionately, nor are those which export weapons (Goal 16) used in conflicts. However, the countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria are, thus, at the bottom of the rung, whereas the countries which export weapons or provide tax havens or pollute are not questioned for their treatment of the planet. The ranking is blind to the incidence of violent conflict or links between consumption and production.

The one-size-fits-all approach also gives countries with small populations an edge over bigger ones. Among the top 10 performing countries, mostly European, 8 have a population of 11 million or less; however, the criteria for assessing countries with significantly large populations and historical maldevelopment (due to colonisation) remains the same. Assessments are blind to historical processes of unequal development.

## Recommendations for Advocacy at the UN SDGs Secretariat

**1. Valuing Improvements in Tier 2 Indicators:** Over 70percent indicators for Goal 5 belong to Tier 2 meaning they are not taken on board for lack of data availability and standardisation across 50percent or more UN member states. Can improvements in Tier 2 Indicators be recognised for individual countries through a system of ranking which is sensitive to improvements? The current system punishes countries for the data short comings of other countries. The SDGs Secretariat can add a note to indicate that progress has been achieved or otherwise. Furthermore, an indicator can be broken into phased sets which can begin with basic statistics and move to more complex coverage in a predetermined time period.

**Action:** The government's SDG machinery can initiate a dialogue within Pakistan and advocate, through the foreign office, at the regional level as well as lobby with other friendly countries to push for this change collectively at the UN level. The recognition can be in the form of a note to indicate improvement.

**2. Address Biases in Relying upon Tier 1 Indicators:** Of the four Tier 1 indicators, Indicator 5.3.2 on female genital mutilation is not relevant to Pakistan; the remaining three, age of marriage, seats in parliament, and presence in managerial positions need to be more nuanced so that a comprehensive picture of political, social, and economic equality can be monitored.

**Action:** Include more criteria for measuring women's leadership and decision-making. Datasets need to include both process and result (e.g., how many women contested for seats in elections; how many voted; how many are employed in the public sector etc.).

**3. Address Biases in Women's Labour Force Participation Rate:** Low labor force participation rates haunt South Asia where women contribute significantly to the care economy. Since the latter is not measured, the government must devise ways to ensure that their contribution is counted.

**Action:** Generate more evidence for including and accommodating women's role in the care economy.



**4. Including Transgender as a Category:** A significant number of countries now recognise transgender. WHO and UNDP also recognise them as a separate legal identity. Improvements in their rights need to be recognised as part of gender equality.

**Action:** Advocacy by the government for inclusion of Transgender Persons as a category at the UN SDG Secretariat.

**5. Grouping Countries Beyond their Geography:** Countries are grouped according to their geographic region only. Other important criteria according to income (high, middle or low), population size, or violent conflict need to be included. Greater global income and resource inequalities within states also need to be acknowledged and addressed. An understanding of the global division of labor among states and resultant inequality in development builds a case for redistribution of resources, and how resources should be valued and consumed.

**Action:** Social movements and CSOs are best placed to push this agenda through their advocacy. The governments in the Global South can endorse and support these movements.

## Pakistan Specific Recommendations

**1. Recognising Gender Equality as a Key Goal:** Pakistan has placed achievement of SDG-5 into Category II as a result of a prioritisation exercise. However, it should be placed in Category I as it concerns more than half the population of the country who cannot be made to wait for the achievement of Category I goals.

**Action:** The SDG machinery and parliamentarians need to place gender equality as a priority because it concerns almost 50 percent of the population.

**2. Improving Data Availability and Standardisation:** The existing administrative datasets can be instrumental in filling data gaps. Some of the reported data does not comply with the standards and computational methodologies set in the metadata. For example, data for 70 (44 percent) indicators is available at the provincial level in Punjab but needs to be strengthened during the collection process so that it is aligned with international requirements.

**Action:** Capacity building of relevant provincial line departments with input from Federal and Provincial Bureaus of Statistics and greater support from lead UN data providers (UN Women, UNDP, WBG and other UN agencies).

**3. Inclusion of Trans Identity in Gender Equality:** Pakistan has granted legal recognition to transgender, as have a majority of other countries in the world. Pakistan should advocate for including transgender at the SDGs level and ensure that data collection includes trans statistics so no one is truly left behind. This will go beyond legal systems to be embedded in education, health, and employment as well as non-discrimination across the board.

**Action:** Relevant ministries, Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS), Parliamentary Committees can ensure that trans as a third gender are fully integrated into data systems as well as advocate for their inclusion into the SDGs.

**4. More Data on VAW:** Currently, Pakistan has partial data provided by PDHS on VAW issues. This data must be taken on board for policy making alongside a concerted move with the women's machinery of the government to begin collecting more systematic data. Consultations with the FBS on rolling out surveys on all forms of violence (embedded in Indicator 5.2.1).

**Action:** The NCSW alongside the PCSWs and provincial women's development departments can take the lead on initiating the exercise of data collection with support from UN Women, UNDP, and WBG.



**5. Assessing the Impact of NGOs for Gender Equality:** NGOs and INGOs across Pakistan are required to provide details of their work in line with the SDGs. Large scale programs focusing on women, changes in laws related to women, and advocacy have made millions of Pakistani women aware of their rights. These changes are manifested in the increased number of women contesting elections, achieving parity at university level, or higher number entering civil services. These achievements need to be highlighted and acknowledged.

**Action:** The Federal Bureau of Statistics and the Women's Machinery can devise new ways of accounting for the positive changes by ensuring standardized methods for reviewing NGOs reports submitted to the Economic Affairs

**6. Accessing more Resources for Gender Data:** Online resources are available for gender data financing as well as the links of gender data to policy. Detailed information needs to be gathered about the specific funding which supports gender data collection, and identifies the gap between currently available and needed financing. For example, the report, State of Gender Financing 2021 provides a clear picture.

**Action:** The SDGs Units lead and devise a systematic plan for accessing financing for the Goal 5 indicators in consultation with UN Women, UNDP, and the World Bank Group.

**7. Develop Pakistan Specific Gender Equality & Empowerment Index:** The UN SDGs Secretariat encourages countries to develop their own additional indicators to capture their own development trajectories. Also, in view of the methodological and data challenges the SDGs confront globally, Pakistan can be a model country by developing its own criteria and indicators for measuring and monitoring its own progress. This will help with investments in strategic gains made in Pakistan.

**Action:** The NCSW as the lead institution can coordinate with the women's machinery, federal and provincial bureaus of statistics, and the SDG Units to set up a Pakistan specific Gender Equality Index.

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