

Transgender Inclusion And Sustainable Development: Bridging Gaps For A Resilient Future

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How to cite this article: Rashmi Pradhan, Reena Jaiswal, Vani Bhushan (2024). Transgender Inclusion and Sustainable Development: Bridging Gaps for A Resilient Future, *Library Progress International*, 44(2), 547-552.

Abstract

In the pursuit of creating a more equitable and sustainable world, integration of transgender inclusivity into the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a critical consideration. The connection between gender-based violence and sustainable development has been increasingly recognized, with studies highlighting the detrimental impact of such violence on individual well-being and collective societal progress.

The SDG-16, addresses the reduction of violence and related deaths among women, including those related to domestic violence and dowry, serves as a crucial entry point for addressing the challenges faced by the Transgenders. Gender-based violence disproportionately affects transgender individuals and presents a significant barrier to sustainable development by reducing their potential, capabilities, and overall well-being, thereby hindering their ability to meaningfully contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Addressing the intersections between gender, health, and the broader 2030 agenda is essential for ensuring that no one is left behind.(Manandhar et al., 2018) The gendered response of health systems, the disparities in access to resources and services, and the impact of societal norms on health behaviors all have implications for the transgender community.

TRANSGENDERS

Transgender rights are important for ensuring that all individuals have equal access to opportunities and resources, regardless of their gender identity. Transgenders are people who do not accept the gender identity, gender behaviour and expression ascribed to them by birth. Every society assigns certain gender roles. Transgenders do not follow the prescribed conventional gender roles and seek a distinct identity, behaviour and expression from that which has been assigned to them by birth. Gender identity refers to a person's innate sense of being a male or female while gender expression refers to how a person communicates his identity to society through his clothing, behaviour, mannerisms or body characteristics. The term transgender is an umbrella term wide enough to cover all types of trans people including cross dressers i.e. the person who wears a mix of clothing, a person with no or dual gender, trans-man, trans-woman, a person with an intersex variation, genderqueer. Transgenders are generally intersexed i.e. neither male nor female.

In India Kinner, Hijra, Aravani, Kothi, and Jogta having socio-cultural identities also fall within the purview of transgender. Over 487,803 lakh transgenders live in the country, according to the 2011 census. They often dress as women in glittering sarees and loud makeup in India. They had a glorious past in ancient and medieval India but were declared a criminal tribe during the British era. They have been looked down upon, exploited and reduced to marginalized communities since then.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Sustainable development goals are an assemblage of seventeen interrelated development global goals outlined to be "a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all." The SDGs were formulated in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly as the 'future global development framework to succeed the age millennium development goals which ended in 2015.' The global goals are also known as the 2030 agenda and featured in the United Nations resolution. The 17 SDGs are: (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reducing Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

To further the SDGs and make them more functional and actionable, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on 6 July 2017 and set up specific targets to be achieved for each goal. It sets up certain indicators to calculate advancement made towards the achievement of goals. Culture, education, health, and gender equity have been identified as cross-cutting issues, meaning these issues are important and affect all stages of development. These need to be mainstream and integrated through all the stages of development rights from training of policies to implementation and evaluation.

The UN resolution in July 2017 published lists of targets and indicators for each of the 17 SDGs. Each goal has about 8–12 targets. Each target has indicators ranging between 1 and 4 to measure progress toward attaining the targets. The targets are described either as ‘outcome targets or means of implementation targets. Goal 17 is totally about how SDGs will be achieved.

Several tools are used to track the progress made toward realising goals. The United Nations Economic and Social Council has set up the United Nations High-level Political Forum on SDG (HLPF) to monitor SDGs globally. The online publication SDG tracker was floated in June 2018, presenting data covering all indicators. The website runs in collaboration with the Our World in Data Database and is based on the University of Oxford. The objective is to "allow people around the world to hold their governments accountable to achieving the agreed goals".

The Indian government has set up the NITI Aayog to achieve the SDGs. It will be measuring India's efforts towards the attainment of the SDGs for 2030.

Literature Review

Previous research has highlighted the challenges faced by transgender individuals in achieving sustainability goals and the importance of inclusive policies and laws.

Gender encompasses the social relationships and roles, behaviors, activities, attributes, and opportunities between males and females, influenced by varying power dynamics and distinct from biological sex. This paper examines the interplay between gender and the 2030 sustainable development agenda, particularly SDG 3 (health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality), proposing a framework to understand their interactions and their impact on health equity and outcomes across multiple SDGs. (Manandhar, Hawkes, Buse, Nosrati, & Magar, 2018).)

Transgender activists and global health partners have developed new tools and guidelines to address the health needs of trans populations, particularly regarding HIV and other STIs. These tools, supported by various international organizations and regional trans groups, offer comprehensive care blueprints and emphasize community empowerment and capacity building. The goal is to strengthen community-led responses to HIV challenges, advocating for immediate use in strategic planning, program design, and training to support trans populations effectively. (Wolf et al., 2016)

Research Gap:

There is a lack of research on the specific role of transgender individuals in sustainable development and the potential contributions they can make to sustainability efforts. While some studies have focused on the challenges faced by transgender individuals, few have explored how they can actively contribute to and benefit from sustainable development initiatives.

Rationale

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring the role of transgender individuals in sustainable development and the challenges they face in achieving sustainability goals. Understanding these aspects is crucial for developing effective policies and initiatives that promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Research Question:

How can transgender individuals be empowered to contribute to sustainable development efforts?

Aim/Objective:

This study aims to explore the role of transgender individuals in sustainable development and the challenges they face in achieving sustainability goals. It seeks to identify ways to empower transgender individuals so that they can actively participate in and contribute to sustainability efforts.

Hypothesis:

Transgender individuals can make unique contributions to sustainability efforts but face significant challenges in achieving sustainability goals due to discrimination and limited access to resources and opportunities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSGENDERS:

Challenges Faced by Transgender Individuals

The transgenders have existed since ages in all cultures and civilizations. But hardly any state collects statistics about the population affected by gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics or includes these issues in their development agenda. Each nation indeed has its priorities. However, the state is bound to follow the policy of inclusion and address the needs of all communities. The state is bound to include the transgenders in its development

efforts and planning policy and review its progress from time to time for uniform development. They are also an important resource of the state who if given proper opportunities can play an important role in the economic growth of the country. Transgenders are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. They have been leading deplorable lives ever since birth facing familial and societal acceptance, shame, humiliation and harassment. They are deprived of political and civic participation, lacks educational and employment opportunities resulting in inadequate income, improper nutrition, improper health and medical facilities, physical violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Segregated from mainstream they live in slums in extreme poverty, suffer from psychosomatic disorders and even resort to drug abuse.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), transgender people frequently encounter violence, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment (UNDP, "LGBTI Inclusion"). These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of legal recognition and protection, which further marginalizes transgender individuals and restricts their ability to contribute to sustainable development (Human Rights Watch, "The Legal Gender Recognition of Transgender People").

Research by the World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that transgender individuals face substantial health disparities, including higher rates of HIV, mental health issues, and barriers to healthcare access (WHO, "Transgender Health"). These health challenges impact their overall well-being and reduce their capacity to engage in and benefit from sustainability initiatives. Similarly, studies on educational outcomes indicate that discrimination in educational settings leads to lower attainment for transgender individuals, which in turn affects their employment prospects and economic stability (UNESCO, "Out in the Open").

Importance of Inclusive Policies and Laws

Inclusive policies and laws play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by transgender individuals and promoting their participation in sustainable development. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, in India is a significant legislative step that aims to prohibit discrimination against transgender individuals in various sectors, including education, employment, and healthcare (Government of India, "Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019"). However, the implementation of such laws remains a challenge, with many transgender individuals still struggling to access their rights due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness among officials (NHRC, "Report on the Rights of Transgender Persons").

Effective enforcement of inclusive policies requires robust monitoring mechanisms and sensitization programs for officials and the general public. The creation of independent bodies to oversee the implementation of these laws can ensure accountability and address grievances, thereby enhancing the participation of transgender individuals in sustainable development (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, "National Council for Transgender Persons").

Unique Contributions of Transgender Individuals to Sustainable Development

Transgender individuals bring unique perspectives and experiences that can enrich sustainable development initiatives. Their lived experiences of navigating and overcoming social and systemic barriers can foster innovative approaches to problem-solving and resilience. Transgender individuals often have deep connections within their communities and can provide valuable insights into the needs and challenges faced by marginalized groups, which is crucial for developing inclusive and effective sustainability strategies.

Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are particularly relevant to transgender individuals, as they emphasize inclusivity, equality, and access to essential services. Here are the key SDGs and their numbers:

1. SDG 1: No Poverty

- **Target 1.4:** Ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership, and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services, including microfinance.
- **Relevance:** Addressing poverty and ensuring economic opportunities for transgender individuals.

2. SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

- **Target 3.8:** Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.
- **Relevance:** Ensuring transgender individuals have access to comprehensive healthcare services, including mental health and gender-affirming care.

3. SDG 4: Quality Education

- **Target 4.5:** Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.
- **Relevance:** Providing inclusive and equitable education opportunities for transgender individuals.

4. SDG 5: Gender Equality

- **Target 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- **Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

- **Target 5.6:** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- **Relevance:** Ending discrimination and violence against transgender individuals and ensuring their reproductive health and rights.

In *Ram Singh v. Union of India* ((2015) 4 SCC 697) the Supreme Court discussed 'homogeneity' within a social class, which can be either internally homogenous (e.g., by caste or occupation) or heterogeneous (e.g., by factors like disability or gender, including transgender individuals). The Court emphasized that backwardness arises from various independent factors—social, cultural, economic, educational, or political—that collectively affect a group's standing in society.

5. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- **Target 8.5:** By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- **Relevance:** Promoting equal employment opportunities and safe work environments for transgender individuals.

6. SDG 10: Reduced Inequality

- **Target 10.2:** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status.
- **Target 10.3:** Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and action in this regard.
- **Relevance:** Reducing social, economic, and political inequalities faced by transgender individuals.

7. SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

- **Target 11.1:** By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.
- **Target 11.7:** By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green, and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
- **Relevance:** Ensuring safe and inclusive living environments for transgender individuals.

8. SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- **Target 16.3:** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
- **Target 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels.
- **Target 16.b:** Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.
- **Relevance:** Ensuring legal recognition and protection of transgender rights and promoting inclusive institutions.

9. SDG 2: Zero Hunger

- End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- **Relevance:** Ensuring transgender individuals have access to adequate food and nutrition, and addressing food insecurity within marginalized communities.

10. SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- **Relevance:** Providing transgender individuals with access to clean water and safe, inclusive sanitation facilities.

11. SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- **Relevance:** Ensuring transgender individuals have equal access to affordable and sustainable energy sources, particularly in marginalized communities.

12. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
- **Relevance:** Promoting inclusive infrastructure development that considers the needs of transgender individuals and supports their economic activities.

By addressing these additional SDGs, efforts can be more comprehensive in promoting the well-being, inclusion of transgender individuals within the broader framework of sustainable development and promote their inclusion and well-being in sustainable development initiatives.

These SDGs collectively address the multifaceted challenges faced by transgender individuals and emphasize the importance of inclusivity and equality in achieving sustainable development.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019

The act was introduced to safeguard transgender rights by implementing anti-discrimination policies and welfare programs to promote their participation in society. The Act mandates the government to provide educational and healthcare services to help transgender individuals earn a livelihood. However, transgender activists have criticized the Act for its lack of inclusivity, as they were not consulted during its creation. They argue that the law perpetuates harmful stereotypes by reflecting a heterosexual perspective.

Key provisions include:

Prohibition against Discrimination: The Act prohibits unfair treatment of transgender individuals in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and public services.

Right to Identity: It guarantees the right to self-identify as transgender.

Right of Residence: Transgender people cannot be forced out of their homes or separated from their families due to their identity.

Healthcare Services: The Act ensures access to health services, including dedicated HIV testing centers and sex change procedures, while medical institutions must improve transgender healthcare training. It also provides full health insurance coverage.

Penal Provisions: It criminalizes actions like begging, forced labor, exclusion from public places, denial of housing, and various forms of abuse.

Despite these measures, the law falls short by excluding key issues such as marriage, adoption, and property rights, as well as social security and pensions. While it offers employment protections, it lacks penalties for labor law violations. Transgender people continue to face significant violence and harassment, signaling the need for stronger protections. Additionally, the law fails to clearly define sexual abuse, imposing only a two-year sentence for such offenses. It also overlooks previous court rulings that recognized the need for affirmative support, neglecting to grant transgender individuals specific educational or job-related rights.

National Council for Transgender Persons: Established under the 2019 Act, this council advises the government on the formulation of policies and programs for the transgender community. It also monitors the implementation of transgender welfare initiatives.

Reservation in Education and Employment: Some states, like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, have introduced reservations for transgender people in educational institutions and government jobs, providing them with quotas similar to those offered to other marginalized groups.

Healthcare Initiatives: The government has introduced schemes that offer transgender-specific healthcare services, including free sex reassignment surgeries and separate HIV testing centers. The Ayushman Bharat scheme also includes transgender individuals in its healthcare coverage.

Garima Greh (Shelter Homes): The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Garima Greh scheme to provide shelter, food, and vocational training to transgender individuals. These homes are meant to provide a safe environment and assist in their rehabilitation.

Pension and Social Security: Some states have introduced pension schemes specifically for transgender people, providing financial support to those who are elderly or without stable employment.

Welfare Boards: Several states have set up transgender welfare boards to address the specific needs of the community. These boards work towards the social, legal, and economic empowerment of transgender individuals by implementing targeted programs and policies.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Government-sponsored campaigns aim to reduce social stigma and promote the inclusion of transgender people by raising awareness in the general public and creating sensitivity in schools, workplaces, and other institutions.

These policies, while progressive, still face challenges in implementation, and many activists argue that more robust measures are needed to ensure comprehensive protection and empowerment of transgender individuals in India.

Education

Education is key to societal progress, but India's current system often neglects transgender issues. To foster inclusivity, reforms must include transgender perspectives in curricula, such as highlighting their historical contributions and struggles, while introducing courses on gender studies and sexuality education. Educators need comprehensive training on transgender issues to create safe and supportive environments. Affirmative action policies, peer-led initiatives, counseling services, and inclusive sex education can further support transgender students. Additionally, vocational training programs, research, and awareness campaigns are essential. Drawing on Vedic traditions and modern legal frameworks, India can create a holistic education system that honors its cultural heritage while promoting transgender inclusivity.

Economic Empowerment and Training

Economic empowerment through inclusive hiring practices, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support is essential for enhancing the participation of transgender individuals in sustainable development. Various skill development

initiatives have been introduced to enhance the employability of transgender individuals, including vocational training and entrepreneurship programs. Programs like Skill India and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) aim to provide vocational training and skill development opportunities for marginalized communities, including transgender individuals. However, there is a need for targeted efforts to ensure that these programs are accessible and relevant to transgender individuals.

Supporting transgender-owned businesses through financial support, mentorship, and market access can also promote economic empowerment and sustainable development. The National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) and other similar initiatives offer support programs for small businesses, including those owned by transgender individuals, to enhance their market access and capacity building.

Conclusion

The literature highlights the significant challenges faced by transgender individuals in achieving sustainability goals and the critical role of inclusive policies and laws in addressing these challenges. However, there is a need for more research on the specific contributions of transgender individuals to sustainable development and the ways in which they can be empowered to participate fully in these efforts. By addressing the existing research gap, this study aims to explore the unique role of transgender individuals in sustainable development and the challenges they face, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective sustainability initiatives.

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