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Global Gender Inequalities: Women's Inclusion in the Policy Planning of India, A Content Analysis of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017) *

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Abstract

Gender inequality remains a pressing global issue, with international organisations emphasising the urgent need to resolve it. India, as part of the worldwide community, has aligned with this imperative by integrating gender-responsive policies into its development frameworks. The Five-Year Plans (FYPs) of India have historically shaped the nation's development trajectory, with the 12th FYP (2012–2017) marking a significant shift by explicitly prioritizing gender-responsive policies in key sectors. This study employs qualitative content analysis to study the representation and inclusion of women in the 12th FYP, using the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) as an analytical framework. The GII evaluates gender disparities across three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation. This research identifies progress and persistent gaps in India's gender-responsive policies by analysing policy language, budgetary allocations, and implementation outcomes. Applying the Capability Approach as a theoretical lens, this study reveals that while the 12th FYP has expanded resources for women in health, education, and the labour market, persistent barriers in social norms, security, and decision-making opportunities continue to limit their real freedoms to convert these resources into meaningful life choices. The findings emphasise that true empowerment requires not only policy provisions, but also institutional reforms to dismantle structural inequalities.

Keywords: Five-Year Plans, Global Gender Inequalities, India, UNDP, Women

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1. Introduction

Women across various cultures and historical periods have consistently faced systemic gender inequality, often being relegated to subordinate social, economic, and political roles. This discrimination manifests in multiple forms, including limited access to education, restricted employment opportunities, low political representation, unequal pay, gender-based violence, and inadequate power over reproductive rights (Oswald, 2023; Parker, 2020). In response, policymakers and civil society actors have implemented reforms and initiatives to combat these disparities. Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist in achieving genuine equality for women across all societal domains.

This pervasive issue transcends regional and cultural boundaries. India, with a population of approximately 1.405 billion, accounts for one-sixth of the world's people (Tamuli & Mishra, 2023). Women constitute nearly half of this population, yet continue to face persistent patriarchal norms and gender disparities (Prillaman, 2023). However, their potential to drive transformative changes in politics, economics, and social issues is immense.

An effective way to address women's issues is by ensuring their meaningful integration into the development planning process. Research indicates that women's socio-economic development is critical for national progress, as it fosters inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and gender equality (Ghosh, 2018). India's FYPs, which have guided the nation's development since independence, increasingly emphasize gender-responsive policies.

Over six decades, FYPs have driven substantial transformations in India's development landscape. The 12th FYP was built on the successes and shortcomings of previous plans, offering a

consolidated framework for sustainable progress. This plan marks a significant shift by explicitly mainstreaming gender considerations across key sectors. It prioritises targeted interventions for women, addressing their diverse needs through sector-specific strategies. This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how the 12th FYP integrates women's concerns, using the UNDP's GII as an analytical framework.

2. Literature Review

While existing literature provides important insights into women's representation in Indian development planning, most analyses (1) remain predominantly descriptive, (2) lack articulated theoretical foundations, and (3) fail to engage systematically with global indicators such as the GII. This study addresses these gaps by offering a focused, indicator-driven content analysis of the 12th FYP, framed through the lens of the GII.

The UN Women's seminal report (Mehta et al., 2012) introduces a three-part framework for analysing women's inclusion in the 12th FYP: as workers, equitable beneficiaries, and voiceless claimants, across sectors such as agriculture, transportation, tourism, health, education, urban sector, rural sector, and sustainable management of natural resources. While this report provides valuable policy insights, its analytical approach focuses primarily on textual analysis rather than on standardised metrics like the GII. As an institutional policy report, it prioritises actionable recommendations over methodological transparency, which subsequently constrains its utility for rigorous comparative analysis.

Mynavathi and Aruna (2016) provide a systematic examination of the Indian government's policy initiatives concerning women's development, empowerment, and entrepreneurship, with particular attention to post-1990s interventions. Their analysis demonstrates how various governmental schemes and programmes have sought to address poverty alleviation, gender equity, and female empowerment. A significant contribution of their work lies in documenting the measurable success of the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement in achieving its stated objectives. Additionally, the authors present compelling evidence of emerging female entrepreneurship patterns that disrupt conventional patriarchal structures within India's business landscape. While their study offers a comprehensive analysis of all the FYPs, particularly focusing on health, education, and employment outcomes, its broad-brush approach lacks the methodological rigour required to assess the practical implementation of gender-responsive policies.

Konwar (2019) examines the progressive evolution of women's empowerment provisions within the FYPs of India, tracing a paradigm shift from early welfare-oriented conceptualisations to later, more holistic frameworks encompassing development and empowerment dimensions. The study elucidates how this transformation reflects the growing recognition of women's empowerment as both a prerequisite and catalyst for human development, particularly among marginalised populations. The paper recommends that both governmental and voluntary sectors implement initiatives and strategies to eradicate inequalities and advance women's empowerment in terms of resources, economic opportunities, influence, rights, and political representation.

Furthermore, De (2021) analyses matters pertaining to women's empowerment in the context of the FYPs, with particular emphasis

on gender equality. Through this critical examination of the FYP, De highlights the central goal of promoting women's status as a crucial aspect of all plans related to the empowerment of women in India.

In addition, Gupta (2014) critically examines all the FYPs of India, assessing the contribution of strategic development to addressing women's issues. In line with Mynavathi and Aruna's viewpoint (2016), Gupta observes that the focus has progressively shifted from welfare-oriented approaches to gender and development frameworks within the FYPs. This shift is essential to address the multifaceted deprivations faced by women, including socio-cultural, institutional, economic, and financial discrimination. Consequently, adopting a gender perspective and integrating a life-cycle approach are pivotal for fostering inclusive growth and ensuring equality.

Kaur (2018) employs a research methodology similar to that of Mynavathi and Aruna (2016), utilising secondary data sources to analyse each FYP. Kaur (2018) asserts that since the implementation of the first FYP (1951-1956), the Indian government has recognised the crucial role of women in development. Over the last few years, there has been a significant realisation that integrating women into the process of inclusive growth can only be achieved by transforming inclusive democracy from a myth into a tangible reality.

In summary, while existing scholarship offers valuable perspectives on women's representation in India's development planning, critical gaps persist in theoretical grounding, methodological rigour, and engagement with global indicators. The reviewed studies collectively highlight the evolution of gender-

responsive policies across FYPs, but remain limited in their systematic analysis of policy effectiveness or alignment with frameworks like the GII.

3. Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, a theoretical framework commonly employed in gender research, has been articulated by Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Kumar Sen. The Capability Approach emphasises two core normative propositions: first, the freedom to achieve well-being holds primary moral importance, and second, well-being must be assessed through individuals' actual capabilities and functioning. The main focus of the Capability Approach is enhancing access to the necessary resources for a gratifying life (Robeyns & Byskov, 2025).

This approach provides a framework for analysing gender inequality through three core concepts: capabilities, resources, and utility. Capabilities represent the actual freedoms people have to pursue what they value in life, such as education or political participation (Sen, 1999). Resources refer to material means, such as income or infrastructure that may enable these freedoms. However, Sen argues that simply having resources does not guarantee capabilities, as social barriers like gender norms can prevent women from converting resources into real opportunities (Robeyns & Byskov, 2025). The concept of utility—personal satisfaction from consumption—is also limited because women may adjust their expectations to unfair conditions (Sen, 1987). This framework shifts our focus from purely measuring resources, to understanding how to genuinely expand women's freedoms and choices. For example, India's 12th FYP addressed both material

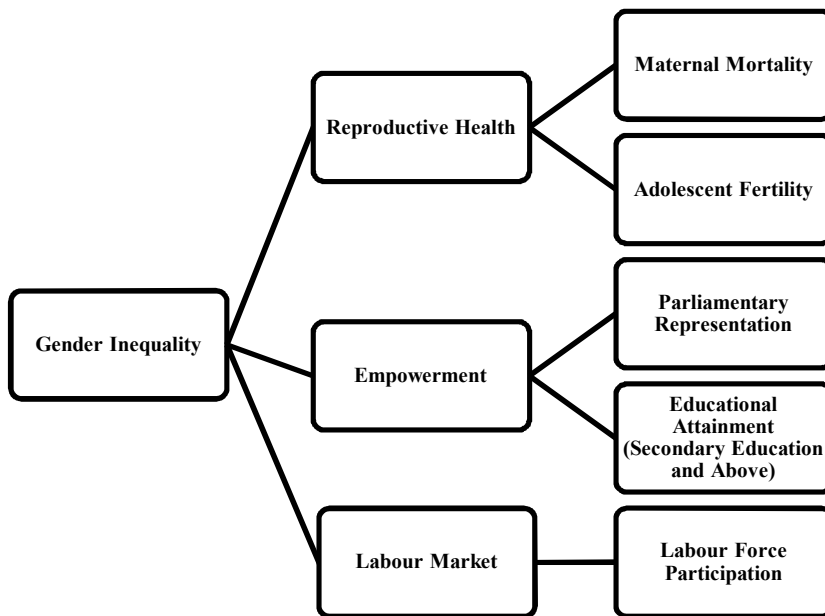
needs (i.e. healthcare) and structural obstacles that limit women's capabilities, demonstrating how this approach can guide more effective policies for gender equality.

The GII (see Figure 1 for the structure) of the GII introduced by the UNDP in 2010 operationalises aspects of this approach by quantifying national losses due to gender disparities across three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. In the health dimension, the GII focuses specifically on women's reproductive health through the Women's Reproductive Health Index, which combines Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and adolescent birth rate data to quantify access barriers. For labour market equality, the GII examines gender disparities in labour force participation rates (LFPR), highlighting structural obstacles to women's employment. The empowerment dimension evaluates educational attainment (secondary education completion rates) and political representation (parliamentary seat shares), creating a composite index that reflects both personal development opportunities and policymaking influence. While the GII does not fully capture the richness of Sen's framework, it provides a pragmatic, globally comparable tool to evaluate policies such as India's 12th FYP. The GII's health dimension, for instance, aligns with Sen's emphasis on bodily autonomy by measuring maternal mortality and adolescent fertility, key indicators of women's control over their reproductive lives. Similarly, its empowerment metrics (education and parliamentary representation) reflect Sen's focus on institutional barriers to equality.

However, the GII's limitations underscore the need for complementary analysis. For example, the 12th FYP addresses issues beyond the GII's scope, such as land rights, sanitation, and energy access, which are critical to expanding women's

capabilities, but lack corresponding indicators. By integrating Sen's broader framework, this study not only assesses the FYP through the GII's measurable dimensions, but also highlights gaps where policy interventions could more holistically advance women's substantive freedoms.

Figure 1. Gender Inequality Index



Source: UNDP, 2010

4. Method

Employing Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), this study examines the representation of women in the 12th FYP of India. As a flexible yet rigorous analytical method, QCA enables researchers to systematically analyse textual data through an iterative process

of coding, categorisation, and thematic development (Krippendorff, 2018; Schreier, 2012). This approach is particularly suited for policy analysis, as it allows for both deductive examination of predefined categories (GII indicators) and inductive discovery of emerging themes. The analysis utilises the GII as its foundational framework, while addressing the index's limitations through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. While the GII provides standardised metrics for health, empowerment, and labour market participation, Sen's approach reveals how the plan facilitates (or constrains) women's substantive freedoms, including access to education and political agency. This dual analytical lens enables both systematic evaluation of policy commitments through GII indicators and critical examination of the plan's broader impacts on women's capabilities.

In this study, the primary data consists of the three volumes of the 12th FYP: (1) Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, (2) Economic Sectors, and (3) Social Sectors. The coding procedure comprised two phases. In the initial coding phase, the text was studied using NVivo 12 Pro (Version 12.6.0.959, QSR International) and coded according to the GII's three predefined dimensions: health (maternal mortality, adolescent birth rates), empowerment (secondary education attainment, parliamentary representation), and labour market (female labour force participation rates). Nodes were created for each indicator to classify relevant sections of the 12th FYP.

During the secondary coding phase, the analysis expanded beyond the GII's indicators to include issues emphasised in the 12th FYP, but not covered by the GII, resulting in the following final node distribution: health (222 nodes), empowerment (261 nodes), and labour market (145 nodes). For instance, under health,

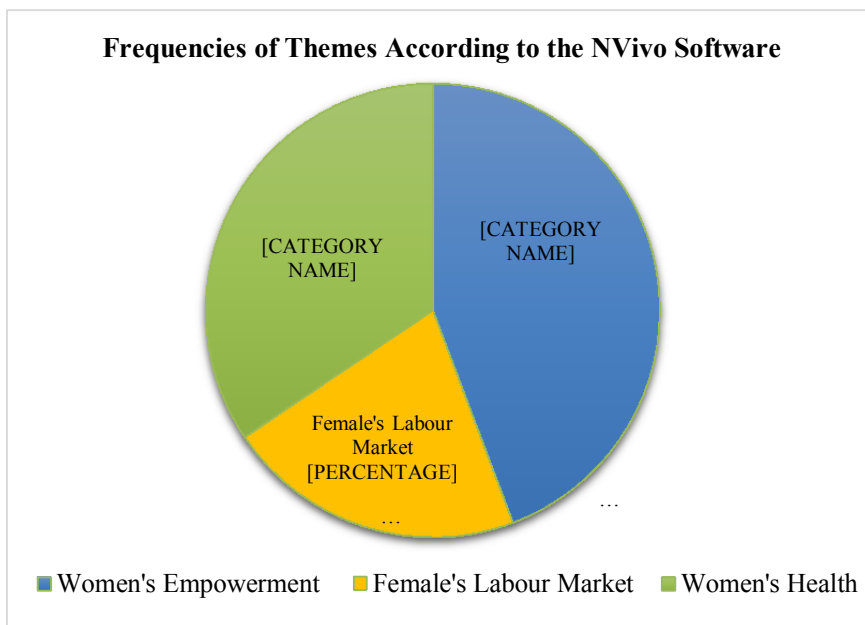
additional nodes were created for nutritional deficiencies, HIV transmission, and sanitation access. The empowerment dimension was supplemented with a new subcategory labelled resources and security to account for financial access, land ownership, and energy resources. Similarly, the labour market dimension incorporated themes such as the feminisation of agriculture and women's roles in handicraft sectors. This adaptive coding strategy ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the GII's framework while capturing the plan's comprehensive approach to gender issues.

To ensure Methodological thoroughness, the 12th FYP was read twice, first to establish contextual understanding and second for systematic coding. The coded themes were cross-referenced with World Bank statistics, such as maternal mortality ratio and female labour force participation rates, to validate policy outcomes and enhance the study's reliability. This global benchmarking allowed for a more contextualised assessment of India's gender policies within international development paradigms. Furthermore, Sen's Capability Approach was applied to interpret gaps in the GII.

5. Discussion

Using the GII, the 12th FYP was examined through three themes: women's health, women's labour market participation, and women's empowerment. Within women's health, the Plan prioritised maternal care over all other topics. For labour-market participation, it focused on women's role in agriculture. Under empowerment, the Plan chiefly addressed educational barriers. It also highlighted women's access to resources and personal security as key pathways to empowerment. Figure 2 shows how often each theme appears in the 12th FYP. The next sections discuss each theme in detail.

Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of Gender-related Themes in the 12th FYP,
Coded Using NVivo Software. Themes Align with the GII's Dimensions:
Health, Empowerment, and Labour Market Participation.



Source: Authors

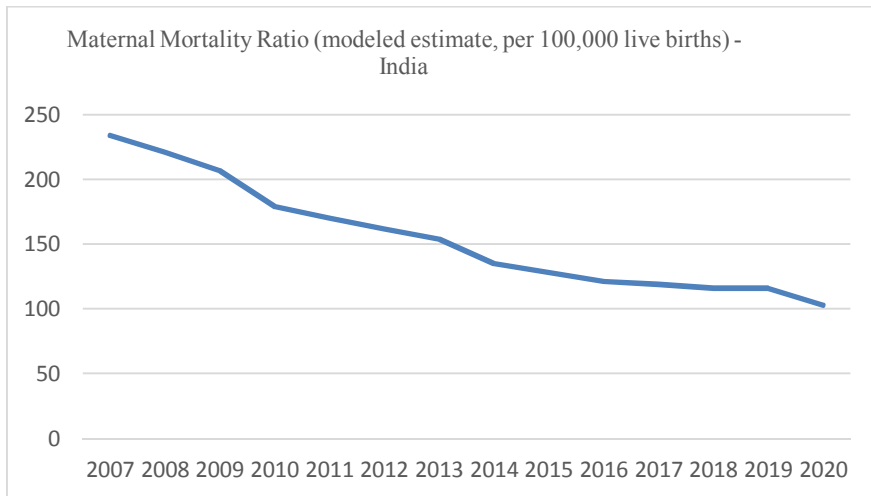
5. 1. Women's Health

The 12th FYP's focus on women's health aligns with Sen's Capability Approach, as it tackles resource allocation (e.g., healthcare infrastructure) alongside structural barriers that restrict women's freedom to achieve well-being. While maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates, the key indicators of the UNDP's GII, are central to the Plan, the FYP expands its scope to include intersecting issues such as nutrition, sanitation, and reproductive rights.

5. 1. 1. Maternal Mortality

The 12th FYP's approach to maternal health demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of resource-based policymaking. Although India's MMR declined from 162 to 119 per 100,000 during the plan period (see Figure 3) (World Bank, 2023), this aggregate improvement masks persistent constraints that prevent women from converting policy provisions into meaningful health freedoms.

Figure 3. Maternal Mortality Ratio in India (2007-2020)



Source: World Bank, 2023

As an example, the 12th Plan's focus on transportation barriers illustrates this tension. While the plan correctly identifies delayed access to emergency obstetric care as a key factor of maternal mortality (Planning Commission, 2013b, p. 198), it fails to address

the social restrictions on women's mobility that often render these transportation resources inaccessible. This exemplifies Sen's distinction between availability of resources and real freedom to use them; a distinction equally apparent in the plan's other maternal health interventions.

Midwifery training programmes, another priority in the 12th Plan, seek to address the shortage of skilled birth attendants (Planning Commission, 2013c, pp. 36-37). However, by focusing solely on technical capacity building without challenging the gender hierarchies that limit women's autonomy in medical decision-making, these programmes risk reproducing a narrow policy approach that mistakes technical solutions for substantive freedoms. Similarly, the Plan's anaemia reduction programmes provide iron/folic acid supplements (Planning Commission, 2013c, pp. 17, 199, 212), while ignoring patriarchal food distribution practices within households that systematically disadvantage women's nutrition.

Perhaps the starkest example of this resource-freedom gap lies in the plan's abortion policies. While the strengthened Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PC-PNDT Act) (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 172) and expanded contraceptive access offer crucial legal and medical support, they fall short of dismantling deeply internalised patriarchal norms, where women unknowingly perpetuate the very constraints imposed upon them. The continued prevalence of family-coerced sex-selective abortions, despite these measures, demonstrates that resources alone cannot ensure reproductive freedom when social constraints remain unaddressed.

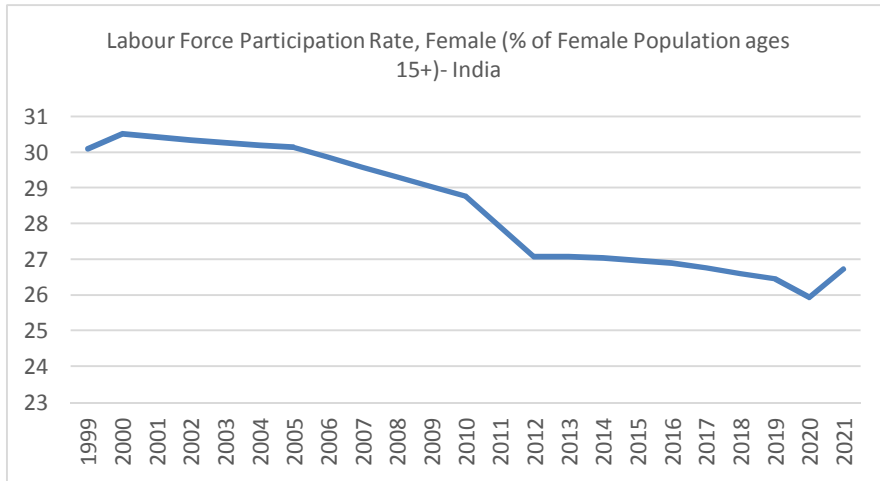
This pattern extends to the Plan's broader health provisions. Adolescent health programmes through the 'Extension of the Right

of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) up to Senior Secondary', while valuable, confront the same capability constraints—increasing school access without addressing the cultural norms that prioritise early marriage over education for girls. Child marriage or early marriage (marriage in which either one or both spouses are below the legal age of 18) annually impacts the well-being of 12 million young women across the world by jeopardizing their physical and mental health (Burgess et al., 2022). The 12th Plan acknowledges that around 43% of married women aged 20–24 was married before turning 18 (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 199), underscoring how limited educational opportunities reinforce early marriage and adolescent births. Briefly, even though the FYP targets health outcomes, its failure to explicitly address patriarchal norms (e.g., decision-making power over reproductive health) limits transformative change.

5. 2. Female Labour Market

India's female labour force participation presents a paradox that challenges conventional development assumptions. Between 2000 and 2020, the country witnessed a consistent annual decline in female labour force participation rates (Verick, 2014), even as educational enrolment among girls increased significantly, revealing that the relationship between women's education and workforce participation is mediated by numerous social factors (Pappu, 2015) (see Figure 4). Several factors behind this decline have been identified: a structural mismatch between women's education and available employment opportunities, rising household incomes that reduce women's financial necessity to work, entrenched traditional values that prioritise domestic roles, and persistent workplace discrimination (Verick, 2014).

Figure 4. Females Labour Force Participation Rate in India (1999-2021)



Source: World Bank (2024)

Beyond the structural and socio-cultural factors driving the decline in women's labour force participation, the policy discourse surrounding their labour force involvement reveals its contradictions. For instance, while the 12th Plan acknowledges women's contributions to sectors like agriculture and handicrafts, its policy language often reduces their participation to drivers of GDP growth rather than an end in itself. This section analyses the 12th FYP's labour market policies for women through the lens of the Capability Approach, highlighting gaps between resource provision and empowerment.

5. 2. 1. Female Labour Force Participation

Following India's economic liberalisation, the agricultural sector witnessed a significant shift, often termed the 'feminisation of agriculture', a trend marked by women's growing numerical

dominance in farm labour relative to men (Das et al., 2021; Pattnaik et al., 2018; Saxena, 2019). However, this numerical dominance cannot be considered as women's empowerment. While women's labour input has increased quantitatively, qualitative measures of empowerment, such as land ownership or decision-making power, remain severely constrained by patriarchal norms, which fundamentally limit their ability to convert agricultural work into economic autonomy. The Plan's proposal for joint land titles (Planning Commission, 2013a, p. 193; Planning Commission, 2013c, pp. 174, 177) theoretically acknowledges the need to address the social structures that enable resources to translate into freedoms, but its lack of enforcement mechanisms renders it largely symbolic. Without confronting these structural barriers, policies risk perpetuating what scholars term the 'feminisation of agrarian distress' (Pattnaik et al., 2018), where women shoulder increasing workloads without gaining corresponding rights or freedoms.

Furthermore, the 12th FYP's approach to women's empowerment in the handicraft sector emphasises vocational training in traditional crafts such as bamboo-weaving as a pathway to economic participation (Planning Commission, 2013b, p. 368; Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 169). While the Plan supports skill development through initiatives such as establishing bamboo mat-making centres and providing training to local women workers, its focus on technical skills alone overlooks cultural and systemic barriers. Rural women artisans face persistent challenges in accessing financial resources, raw materials, technology, and fair markets—structural limitations that significantly constrain the potential benefits of training programmes. The Plan's vision of linking traditional crafts to industrial applications (such as producing bamboo mat corrugated sheets for roofing) demonstrates awareness of the sector's economic potential, but does little to

ensure that women can translate these skills into sustainable livelihoods

Eventually, according to Sen's Capability Approach, while the initiatives of the 12th Plan, like skill development and joint land titles, aim to enhance women's economic participation, they often neglect the broader conditions necessary for genuine agency. True empowerment requires more than access to resources; it demands systemic changes that enable women to convert skills and labour into meaningful freedoms, from fair wages and decision-making power to control over assets.

5. 3. Women's Empowerment

The 12th FYP's approach to women's empowerment demonstrates a fundamental tension between material provisions and substantive freedoms. The Plan significantly seeks to expand resource allocation for women's education by addressing critical infrastructure gaps, including sanitation facilities, transportation access, and teacher shortages, yet it fails to adequately address strategies to confront the patriarchal social norms that prevent these resources from translating into genuine educational capabilities. This same tension also manifests in political representation: while the Plan actively documents women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, its silence on parliamentary reservation quotas constitutes a notable omission. In the following section, we will study the 12th FYP's policies regarding women's participation in education and politics in detail.

5.3.1. Women's Education

The 12th Plan places significant emphasis on women's education as a pivotal avenue for empowerment; yet some barriers, particularly at the secondary education level, continue to hinder progress. Although female enrolment in India grew between 2012 and 2017 (World Bank, 2025), social and infrastructural challenges persist. For example, in underserved regions, long distances to schools and limited access to public transportation force girls to drop out. To address this, the 12th Plan prioritises girls' hostels and safer transport, which have shown notable success for marginalised groups (Mukherjee & Dasgupta, 2023). While hostel provision alone has not significantly shifted overall enrolment ratios, it has reduced dropout rates among these communities and alleviated teacher accommodation shortages in remote areas.

Another critical but often overlooked barrier is the lack of gender-segregated toilets. The 12th Plan highlights that over 63% of rural schools lack usable toilets (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 54), a deficit that severely impacts girls' attendance. By investing in separate sanitation facilities, alongside education quality improvements, the plan aligns with evidence that such infrastructure boosts enrolment, especially at the upper primary level (Ray & Datta, 2017). These measures underscore a broader principle: access to education depends not purely on the availability of schools, but also on conditions that enable sustained participation, a notion central to the Capability Approach, which stresses the conversion of resources (e.g., infrastructure) into real opportunities (e.g., consistent attendance).

Beyond formal education, the 12th Plan's vocational training initiatives, such as programmes for women living with HIV (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 175), demonstrate how skill-

building enhances economic agency. By equipping women with livelihood tools and awareness, these efforts bridge the gap between education and meaningful labour market engagement, ultimately fostering inclusive growth. Here, too, the implicit focus on expanding women's choices and freedoms resonates with the Capability Approach's core tenet: development must empower individuals to achieve outcomes, not just provide nominal access.

5. 3. 2. Women's Political Representation

Despite significant progress in narrowing gender gaps across various sectors, political representation remains a male-dominated sphere, where women continue to face marginalisation. The Indian political landscape exemplifies this paradox, where despite being the world's largest parliamentary democracy, a gender disparity persists among both voters and elected officials (Rajput & Thakkar, 2023). Legislative participation serves as a crucial mechanism for political empowerment, enabling individuals to directly influence policymaking processes (Ghosh, 2022). The presence of women in national legislatures not only reflects gender equality in governance, but also enhances the quality of democratic deliberation and government accountability.

The GII identifies parliamentary representation as a key metric of women's empowerment; yet, the 12th Plan remains silent on strategies to enhance women's participation at higher levels of government. However, the 12th FYP emphasises the necessity of increasing women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), particularly in village-level affairs and agricultural decision-making. This local-level political engagement, while not compensating for the lack of representation in national parliament,

provides women with vital opportunities to develop political capabilities, the skills, confidence, and experience necessary for effective governance. Such grassroots participation aligns with the broader understanding that empowerment requires more than formal rights; it demands the creation of environments where women can convert political opportunities into meaningful action.

Moreover, when examining women's political participation through the lens of the Capability Approach, the contrast between local and national representation becomes particularly illuminating. While constitutional reservations have successfully increased women's presence in Panchayati Raj institutions, the absence of similar structural interventions at higher levels of government reflects a fundamental capability deprivation. The Approach would interpret this disparity as not merely a quantitative gap in representation, but as a qualitative limitation on women's ability to exercise full political agency across all levels of governance.

Women's political empowerment cannot be isolated from broader dimensions of development, including health, education, and economic participation. The 12th FYP's long-term perspective recognises these interconnections, acknowledging that sustainable progress requires simultaneous attention to all factors that enable or constrain women's ability to participate fully in public life. This comprehensive approach not only serves moral imperatives of equality, but also promises substantial economic benefits through more inclusive growth and improved governance outcomes.

5. 3. 3. Resources and Security

The coding process revealed that certain critical aspects of women's empowerment in the 12th Plan are beyond the GII,

necessitating the creation of a new category titled 'Resources and Security'. This addition captures what might be termed the 'infrastructure of empowerment' - material and social conditions that determine women's real freedom to achieve valued functioning. These essential but often overlooked factors, such as access to financial resources, urban services, land rights, energy, and personal security, fundamentally shape women's ability to convert formal rights into substantive opportunities, a core concern of the Capability Approach. While traditional metrics focus on outcomes, these dimensions address the foundational conversion factors that enable women to exercise agency in both private and public spheres.

Land ownership emerges as a crucial focus area in the 12th Plan, with specific provisions for gender-equal property rights. The section of the 12th Plan, which allows land contracts to be registered jointly or exclusively in women's names (Planning Commission, 2013c, pp. 174, 177), represents more than legal reform; it creates substantive opportunities for economic independence and social standing. Such measures directly affect women's capacity to convert legal rights into tangible improvements in their lives, whether through agricultural productivity, housing security, or intra-household decision-making power. The Plan's emphasis on land distribution to Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) families (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 243) similarly recognises how asset ownership can serve as a foundation for sustainable livelihoods.

The 12th Plan explicitly recognises women as primary stakeholders in household energy management (Planning Commission, 2013b, p. 132; Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 171), reflecting how gender roles shape energy access challenges. When

women lack reliable LPG supply due to insufficient infrastructure, they face disproportionate burdens, spending hours collecting firewood and using polluting traditional fuels. This time-intensive work not only exposes them to health risks from indoor air pollution, but also restricts their ability to pursue education or income-generating activities, effectively limiting their substantive freedoms. The Plan's response goes beyond simple fuel provision by aiming to develop women's technical expertise in renewable energy sectors (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 171). This strategic approach seeks to transform women from passive energy consumers into active energy professionals and entrepreneurs.

Financial inclusion initiatives, particularly for survivors of violence, illustrate how resource access intersects with personal security. The Plan's restorative justice provisions recognise that economic support constitutes a vital component of rehabilitation, enabling survivors to rebuild their lives with dignity (Planning Commission, 2013c, pp. 172, 173, 181). This approach reflects an understanding that financial resources serve not just immediate needs, but also create pathways out of vulnerable situations.

Another critical challenge facing the Indian society is constrained social mobility, where the intersecting barriers of caste hierarchy and patriarchal norms create particularly severe limitations for women's advancement. The caste system's rigid structure traditionally restricts movement between socio-economic strata, while gender norms impose additional constraints that leave women, even within the same caste groups, with fewer opportunities for upward mobility than their male counterparts.

The 12th Plan demonstrates awareness of this dual disadvantage by specifically targeting women from STs, SCs, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and introducing them as 'the most

vulnerable people in India' (Planning Commission, 2013c, p. 238). It identifies that poverty reduction programmes alone cannot address the unique 'gender-based issues of inclusiveness' that affect all women across economic strata. This recognition suggests an implicit understanding that true empowerment requires addressing both the resources available to women and the social constraints that limit their ability to convert those resources into meaningful life improvements.

However, the Plan's approach remains inconsistent in practice. Despite acknowledging the distinct nature of gender barriers, its policy formulations frequently combine women's issues with those of other marginalised groups (SCs, STs, OBCs, persons with disabilities). This conceptual grouping risks obscuring the specific mechanisms through which gender norms independently restrict women's social mobility and opportunity expansion.

Finally, this examination reveals the way in which the 12th Plan's focus on resources and security aligns with the Capability Approach by addressing critical conversion factors that shape women's substantive freedoms. However, the current Gender Inequality Index (GII), while valuable for measuring disparities in reproductive health, political participation, and labour market outcomes, lacks indicators for women's access to services, resources, and security. It is suggested that future GII revisions consider incorporating these dimensions to better capture the structural conditions that influence gender inequality across multiple domains.

6. Conclusion

The 12th FYP represents a critical evolution in India's approach to gender-responsive development, moving beyond welfare-based policies to a framework that recognises women's agency as central to inclusive growth. While the Plan demonstrates a clear commitment to gender equality, its effectiveness is constrained by structural barriers that limit women's ability to convert policy provisions into substantive freedoms.

Policies designed to expand women's access to resources often fail to dismantle the patriarchal norms that restrict their freedoms. Maternal healthcare initiatives, for example, improve medical infrastructure, but do little to challenge the gendered decision-making that limits women's autonomy over their own bodies. Similarly, educational reforms increase enrolment without confronting the social pressures that push girls out of school. Labour market policies promote women's participation, but neglect the systemic barriers, such as the wage gap, that reinforce economic inequality.

This study has identified how the 12th FYP's progressive focus on resource access and security provisions, such as land rights, financial inclusion, and safety measures, points to dimensions currently underrepresented in the GII framework. Rather than suggesting deficiencies, these findings offer valuable evidence for enhancing the GII's comprehensiveness. Incorporating such dimensions could strengthen the index's ability to capture critical conversion factors between policy and empowerment. It is suggested that future revisions of the GII incorporate security and resource dimensions, as their inclusion would enable a more robust measurement of gender inequality.

Ultimately, the 12th Plan signifies a transformative step toward inclusive development, aligning with India's global sustainability commitments. To build on this progress, future policies must adopt a more nuanced, gender-responsive strategy, one that not only removes structural obstacles but also upholds women's substantive freedoms.

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