

Gender Equality is a Myth

I Introduction

~~Understanding Gender Equality~~

- Thesis Statement: While progress has been made both globally and in Pakistan, towards achieving gender equality, persistent disparities in economic participation, political representation, and social rights indicate that true gender equality remain a myth rather than a ~~reality~~ yet.

II Importance of Gender Equality

- Role in Sustainable Development.

III The Myth of Gender Equality

a. Gender Disparities in Economic Opportunities

b. Women Being Underrepresented in Political Leadership

c. Girls Facing Barriers to Accessing Quality Education

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d. Deep-rooted Societal Norms Continue to Reinforce Inequality

IV Manifestation of Gender Equality

a. Encouraging Progress towards Economic Independence of Women

b. Boosting Roles of Female in Politics

c. Efforts Being Made to Ensure Access to Education for Girls

d. Laws to Address Cultural Barriers and Root-causes of Gender Inequality

V. Will Gender Equality Remain a Myth or Reality?

• Prospects are Promising, future may see a positive response towards gender equality attainment.

VI Recommendations for Attaining Gender Equality

a. Global Joint Efforts Must Not End

b. Pakistan-Specific Recommendations

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VI Conclusion

- Gender Equality still remains a more goal, call for collective global action is required.



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"No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men," said Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. These powerful words underscore the critical role of women in building thriving nations, yet the world continues to grapple with entrenched gender inequality. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her book *We Should All Be Feminists*, remarked, "But today we live in a vastly different world. We have evolved; but it seems to me that our ideas of gender have not evolved."

Her sentiment resonates deeply with the reality in both developed and developing nations, where gender parity remains an elusive goal. While progress has been made towards achieving gender equality, persistent disparities in economic

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participation, political representation, and social rights indicate that true gender equality remain a myth rather than a reality yet.

Gender equality is fundamental to achieving a sustainable, just, and inclusive society. As stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Framework), achieving gender equality is not merely a standalone goal but a crucial enabler of other objectives. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underscored this by saying, "Gender equality is more than a goal itself. It's a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance." However the neglect of gender equality continues to undermine its transformative potential.

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Economically, equal participation of women contributes significantly to GDP growth. McKinsey Global Institute reports that advancing gender parity could add \$12 trillion to the global economy by 2025. Politically, gender-equal representation fosters diverse perspectives and inclusive governance. Socially, ensuring women's rights enhances overall societal well-being. Despite these imperatives, the gap persists, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, where cultural norms and systemic barriers hinder progress.

Despite women comprising nearly half of the global population, their participation in the workforce remains disproportionately low. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, the global gender gap is 68.4% closed, highlighting ongoing economic disparities. Further the report states that women hold 42% of all jobs

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occupy only 25% of C-suite positions, indicating less employment opportunities. In Pakistan, only 22% of women are part of labor force, compared to 78% of men (World Bank, 2022). The causes of this disparity in ~~2022~~ include limited access to financial resources, discriminatory hiring practices, and workplace harassment. For instance, in rural Pakistan, women's labor is often unpaid, as their contributions to agriculture and household businesses are considered part of their domestic responsibilities. This economic exclusion not only stifles women's individual potential but also hampers national development. Closing the gender employment gap could boost Pakistan's GDP by 30%. However, persistent economic disparities underscore that gender equality in economic opportunities remains a distant reality.

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Moreover, Women's political underrepresentation is another glaring indicator of gender inequality. Political empowerment has the largest gender gap globally, with only 22% of this gap closed. Women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles. In some regions, female political participation is even lower, and the situation is worse in Pakistan, where women constitute 20.2% of National Assembly (reserved seats), one of the lowest in South Asia (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Only 10% of ministerial positions in Pakistan are held by women, reflecting a severe gender gap in leadership roles (UNDP Pakistan Gender Equality Report 2023). Social and cultural barriers, such as patriarchal norms and a lack of family support deter women from entering politics. Even those who do face significant challenges, including gender-based discrimination and limited

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access to resources for campaigning. In Pakistan, Women politicians often face character assassination and are excluded from decision-making processes within their parties. This exclusion has broader implications for governance, as it sidelines women's perspectives on critical issues such as education, healthcare, and gender-based violence. The underrepresentation of women in political leadership underscores the systemic barriers that continue to hinder gender equality.

Furthermore, Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of gender equality. However, millions of girls worldwide are denied this right. UNESCO reports that 129 million girls globally are out of school, with Pakistan accounting for 22.8 million of these cases. Cultural norms, poverty, and early

marriages are significant barriers to girls' education. In rural areas of Pakistan, schools are often inaccessible, and families prioritize boys' education over girls. Additionally, the lack of female teachers and gender-segregated facilities discourages parents from sending their daughters to school. In Balochistan, only 27% of women are literate compared to 56% of men, highlighting the stark educational disparity.

Educating girls has proven benefits. According to a World Bank study, each additional year of schooling increases a girl's future earnings by 10-20%. Yet, the ongoing barriers to girls' education reflect the deeply entrenched societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

Additionally, societal norms and cultural beliefs play a significant role in perpetuating gender inequality. In

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many communities, women are expected to conform to traditional roles as homemakers and caregivers, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. These norms are reinforced through media, religion, and family structures. Human rights defenders estimate that roughly 1,000 women are murdered in so-called "honor killings" every year in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2018-19), 34% of women aged 15-49 reported experiencing domestic violence. Cases like Clandeel Baloch (a social media influencer murdered by her brother for "dishonoring" the family) highlights the extreme consequences of gendered societal expectations. These deep-rooted not only restrict women's rights but also hinder societal progress. The prevalence of these beliefs showcases that true gender equality is an elusive goal.

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Despite the challenges highlighted, it is essential to acknowledge the progress made in various domains addressing gender inequality. Multiple initiatives and efforts, both globally and in Pakistan, have been introduced to bridge these gaps. These measures, though not without limitations, reflect the potential for meaningful change and gradual dismantling of entrenched barriers to equality.

While economic disparities exist, progress has been made to address them. Initiatives such as microfinance programs and women-focused entrepreneurship schemes have empowered countless women. The Benazir Income Support Program in Pakistan has provided financial assistance to millions of women, enabling them to start small businesses and improve their livelihoods. Moreover,

the rise of remote work and digital platforms has opened new avenues for women's economic participation. Organizations like Women's Digital League in Pakistan are equipping women with digital skills, allowing them to overcome traditional barriers to employment. These developments demonstrate that while economic disparities persist, targeted interventions can pave the way for greater gender equality.

Secondly, women's representation in politics, though limited, has shown gradual growth. The presence of prominent female leaders such as Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern, and Kamala Harris have proven that women can excel in politics, even in male-dominated environments. In Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, the first woman elected

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to head a democratic government, has inspired a new generation of women to pursue political careers. Similarly, legislative measures, such as reserved seats for women in parliaments, have also increased their visibility in decision making roles. Furthermore, global movements advocating for women's political empowerment, such as UN Women's "Step it Up for Gender Equality," are driving systemic change. In Pakistan, organizations like Aurat Foundation are actively working to train and mentor women political aspirants. While challenges remain, these efforts highlight the potential for women to achieve greater political representation.

Thirdly, efforts to improve girls' education have yielded positive results. Programs like the Malala Fund

have raised global awareness about the importance of girls education. In Pakistan, initiatives such as Punjab's "Zewar-e-Taleem" and Rs. 25 billion "Honhar Scholarship" program provide financial incentives to encourage girls education. Additionally, the rise of non-formal education models, such as community-based schools, has made education more accessible for girls in remote areas. Organizations like The Citizens Foundation have established over 1,600 schools in underprivileged communities across Pakistan. These initiatives demonstrate that while barriers exist, sustained efforts can significantly improve girls' access to education.

Lastly, societal norms are not immutable; they can evolve with education and awareness. Grassroots

movements and media campaigns are challenging traditional beliefs and promoting gender equality. The initiatives like UN Women's "HeForShe" campaign encourage men to actively support gender equality. In Pakistan, community leaders, religious scholars, and social influencers have played a role in advocating for women's rights within an Islamic framework. The Protection of Women Act (2006) and The Anti-Honor Killing Law (2016) criminalize practices like honor killings and strengthen legal recourse for survivors of violence in Pakistan. The commitment of both community and state towards emphasizing gender sensitivity are gradually shifting societal attitudes. While deeply ingrained norms take time to change, these efforts highlight the potential for transforming societal beliefs.

The future of gender equality hinges on sustained efforts and collective action. While progress has been made, significant challenges persist, especially in underdeveloped nations like Pakistan. However, global trends indicate a growing awareness of gender issues, with movements such as #MeToo and campaigns for equal pay gaining traction. In Pakistan, the prospects are promising, albeit gradual. The increasing participation of women in workforce, politics and education signals a shift in societal attitudes. Yet, the road to gender equality remains long, requiring persistent advocacy, policy reforms and cultural transformation.

Reforms for achieving gender equality at the global level emphasize the need for robust legislative framework.

to eliminate gender-based discrimination. Governments must implement and enforce gender-sensitive laws addressing workplace harassment, unequal pay, and domestic violence while ensuring effective enforcement mechanisms. Increased investment in education and healthcare is also essential, with initiatives such as free primary and secondary education and accessible reproductive healthcare services empowering women. Promoting equal pay for equal work and offering tax breaks or subsidies to companies employing women can help bridge economic disparities. Establishing mentorship programs and leadership training can enhance women's representation in decision-making roles, while fostering global collaboration through technical and financial support from international organizations can accelerate progress in countries lagging behind in gender parity.

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In Pakistan, recommendations for gender equality are necessary. Firstly educational policies must be reformed to increase girl's enrollment by building schools in rural areas, hiring female teachers, and providing stipends to female students to reduce dropout rates. Secondly, economic inclusion programs, such as expanding the Benazir Income Support Program and offering microfinance opportunities, are vital for fostering women's economic empowerment. Thirdly, enforcing leadership quotas should be complemented by capacity-building programs to ensure women's meaningful participation in politics and governance. Finally, societal norms must be challenged through media campaigns and grassroots movements aimed at dismantling patriarchal attitudes and promoting gender equality as a shared societal value. Additionally, strengthening the legal framework to address honor killings.

workplace harassment, and domestic violence is also critical to safeguarding women's rights and fostering a more equitable society.

In conclusion, gender equality is not just a moral imperative, it is a prerequisite for sustainable development and societal progress.

Despite advancements, persistent disparities in economic opportunities, political representation, and social rights continue to highlight the gap between aspiration and reality.

The journey toward gender equality demands a multifaceted approach, addressing systemic barriers and deep-rooted societal norms. As Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary-General, aptly stated, "Achieving gender equality requires the engagement of women and men, girls and boys. It is everyone's

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responsibility." The collective responsibility of governments, international organizations, and individuals is paramount. Through education, legal reforms, and societal awareness, the vision of a gender-equal world can be realized. Until then, gender equality remains a goal to strive for - a journey rather than a destination. As Malala Yousafzai said, "We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back." It is time to break these barriers and ensure a future where equality is not just a myth but a lived reality for all.