

# WE NEED A PARADIGM SHIFT ON GENDER

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Growth & Development - Demographic Economics & Various Indexes

India is the only country in the WEF list to exhibit a wider economic gap than its political one

India's rank, at 112th out of 153 countries, on a chart drawn from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020 is no shocker. The country has been backsliding on this for years. India was ranked No 98 in 2006, when the WEF's first gender gap report was published, and other countries have performed better in the years since. The index tracks gender-based disparities on economic, political, education and health criteria. While India is 18th on political representation, the country fares very poorly on the other three parameters. The starkest dip has been on economic opportunity and participation, on which the country is ranked 149th. Just four countries do worse than that.

India is the only country in the WEF list to exhibit a wider economic gap than its political one. This is a conundrum. Research studies have long shown that political empowerment tends to yield dividends on other counts of gender equity. But a not-so-bad share of female voices in our legislative bodies have done little for overall women's welfare, as sobering data on just about everything else—especially our abysmal female labour force participation rate—reveals.

Social observers often contend that considerable progress has been made on some fronts. But the arc of progress is not straightforward, and even though gender parity is an official policy in various corporate and other settings, the outcomes remain extremely poor in comparison with other countries. What the country needs is a paradigm shift. Unless India undergoes a social revolution that puts the idea of equity at its forefront, gender gaps would get harder to close.

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