

## **Bridging the Gender Parity Gap**

### **Why in news?**

In the recently released Global Gender Gap index by WEF for 2021, India falls 28 spots and is placed at 140<sup>th</sup> position.

### **What does the report say?**

- The Index has four pillars- education attainment, health, political empowerment and economic participation.
- In Asia region, only Pakistan and Afghanistan are behind India.
- India has suffered mainly in political empowerment and economic participation.
- India fell from 18 to 51 in political empowerment of women, despite women having a great opportunity to get better participation in political decision-making.
- As against a global average of 50%, India has just 12 % participation, which clearly is an issue of political will, as local self-government body elections have shown good participation.
- The labour participation of women is 22%, one of the lowest in the world (comparable countries have 50%).
- Educational attainment and economic participation are closely linked and the gender gap issue in India is stark here.
- The big drop in enrolment of girls in primary (93%), secondary (62%) and tertiary (29%) education which is alarming.
- The pandemic has affected more women than men.

### **What does the report suggest?**

- The global GDP could rise by as much as \$28 trillion by 2025 if women play an equal role to men in labour markets.
- If both domestic and MNCs businesses join hands with the government to close the gender gap in economic empowerment, so that India could add at least a trillion annually to its GDP by 2029.
- Companies with more women representation have achieved 22 % higher productivity, 40% better customer retention and 27% more profitability.
- Giving due recognition to the informal and vulnerable sections of the

labour market and investing in them can make changes for the women workforce.

- There is a need for policies in sectors where women participation is significant- healthcare, IT, education, agriculture and also in emerging areas like artificial intelligence, block chain.
- Skill India should develop programmes for girls/women and address the systemic and behavioural issues.

### **What more can be done now?**

- In the last few years India has several schemes devised— from Skill India, Make in India to Atmanirbhar and Beti Padhao.
- The schemes must be implemented in true spirit, allocated budgets for the schemes should be spent fully and district collectors needs to be held accountable. (Nirbhaya fund was seriously under-utilised.)
- Start-up India must develop schemes to build an ecosystem for women entrepreneurs to thrive and encourage PPP.
- A renewed thrust on innovation that focus on promotion of innovations by women, support to innovations for the underprivileged etc. should be encouraged.
- Due recognition should be given to businesses that contribute to the national gender parity goals.
- Enterprises must embrace policies for inclusion that help women progress in career, up-skilling, return-to-career schemes, flexi-work, special leave, wage parity, hybrid working models.
- An independent authority like the UIDAI for gender parity should be created that can be the nodal agency for scaling-up at district levels with clear objectives, metrics, targets and good governance.
- It can address a multitude of areas like education, skilling, safety, transparency in informal sector labour participation, wage parity, and women business opportunities.
- Every organisation should establish and track pre-decided common metrics derived from the national priorities.
- For example, start with four major metrics such as percentage of women in leadership positions, diversity ratio adherence, pay parity and culture adherence.
- The CSR funds should be channelized towards localised women community engagement and skilling which could be done in partnership with district administrations.
- The government needs to be lobbied to add women-specific work as a key

CSR focus and policy-makers needs to be influence for gender equality policies.

- Closing the gender gap will take 100 years at the current rate but will need urgent focus and clear accountability for the policies, laws, schemes.

**Source: Business Line**

