



GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION - GS I AND II MAINS

Q. Women's education is important for society to flourish. However, it faces several challenges in the Indian context. Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Gender equity in education: the need to focus on early childhood education*

What's in the news?

- The 2023 Annual Status of Education Report shows that while girls and boys from rural India equally aspire to become doctors or engineers, when it comes to choosing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses, it is boys who take up STEM courses more than girls.

Current Status of Gender Equity in Education in India:

1. Gender Equity in Learning Outcomes:

- National Achievement Survey (2017) shows parity in learning levels between boys and girls in elementary and secondary classes across the country.

2. Gender Gap in Mean Years of Schooling:

- Over the past two decades, the mean years of schooling for girls has almost tripled from just 1.7 years in 1990 to 4.7 in 2018, while for males from 4.1 to 8.2 years.
- The gender gap has increased from 2.4 years to 3.5 years.

3. Widening Gender Gap with Level of Education:

- Girls have higher dropout rates compared to boys as the level of education increases.
- This is due to greater barriers to schooling for girls due to social norms and gender stereotypes correlated with female adolescence.

4. Gender Gap in Enrolment in Private Schools:

- More boys than girls tend to be enrolled in private institutions.
- Girls enrollment in free government schools highlights societal gender biases in exercising school choice.

Issues in Women Education:

1. Gap in Upper Primary and Secondary Schooling:

- While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling.

2. High Drop-out Rates:

- Increased female enrolment is compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children.



3. Inter-state variations:

- There are also considerable inter-state variations in gender parity.
- While the greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh.

4. Son preference:

- Some studies suggest that girls are over-represented in the government schools, demonstrating continuing son preference where boys (highlighted in economic survey 2018) are educated in private and better schools which are of (perceived) better quality.

Government Efforts towards Women Education in India:

1. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme:

- It aims to generate awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services for the girl child.
- The initial aim of the campaign was to address the declining child sex ratio but it also included propagating education, survival and protection of the girl child.

2. Digital Gender Atlas:

- The Ministry of Education has prepared a digital gender atlas for advancing girls' education in India.

3. National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE):

- The objective of the scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce the drop outs and to promote the enrolment of girl children in secondary schools.

4. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:

- In order to ensure greater participation of girls in elementary education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has targeted interventions for girls which include opening of schools, appointment of additional women teachers, separate toilets for girls, teachers' sensitisation programmes etc.
- In addition, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas has been opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs).

5. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA):

- It envisages enhancing the quality of education by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, improving quality of education imparted at secondary level, removal of gender, socio-economic and disability barriers.

6. Udaan:

- CBSE has launched 'Udaan' to provide free online resources to girl students of Class XI and Class XII for preparation.
- The special focus of the scheme is to address the low enrolment ratio of girl students in prestigious institutions.

7. STEM Education:

- To increase the participation of women in STEM education, supernumerary seats have been created in the IITs and NITs.



WAY FORWARD:

1. Focus on early childhood education (ECE):

- Early childhood is where gender norms take root, addressing biases in ECE can eliminate long-term gender gaps.
- Urgent need to focus on ECE, with regulatory frameworks, funding and legislation for universal access to tackle gender disparities.

2. Addressing Structural Challenges:

- The lack of a regulatory framework, inadequate funding, poor quality and no legislation for universal access to early childhood education must be addressed urgently.

3. Eliminating Gender Stereotypes:

- Early childhood education should also focus on imparting education that eliminates gender stereotypes and helps erase the gender gap.

4. Government Schemes:

- Schemes such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and the new National Education Policy places importance on ECE and hence, should be implemented at the earliest in mission mode.

