

Original Research Article

Gender Gap in Arunachal Pradesh: An Obstacle for Viksit Arunachal

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Abstract: The vision of Viksit Arunachal is a long-term developmental vision to make Arunachal Pradesh a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable state. But, despite these significant advances in health, education and infrastructure, gender inequality is still a chronic structural issue. Women are actively involved in agricultural activities, household production, and social life but they are under-represented in formal jobs, decision-making, political institutions, and property ownership in Arunachal Pradesh. The paper addresses the multi-dimensionality of the gender gap in Arunachal Pradesh with the help of secondary data sources like NFHS reports, Census data and literature on the subject. The research identifies gender disparities in the state as not only social but also structural, as a result of customary laws, restricted economic opportunities and unequal access to resources. The paper ends by stating that to realize one's dream of a Viksit Arunachal it is imperative to eliminate gender disparity. The gender gap in India is not only a grave violation of gender equality; it is also a significant obstacle to economic growth. The gender gap in India is not only a violation of the gender equality but it is also a hindrance in economic development of the country.

Keywords: Infrastructure, Gender Inequality, Agricultural Activities, Political Institutions, Disparity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental element of sustainable development the world over. Arunachal Pradesh is one of the parts of North East region in India which exhibits the unique socio-cultural characteristics, ecological richness and tribal diversity. Gender equality has emerged as a key focus of development discourse globally. Empowerment of women has been identified as a fundamental requirement for economic growth and sustainable development, as well as a social justice issue by international frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). Viksit Bharat by 2047 also emphasizes on women as a major force for development in India, their contribution to economic transformation, innovation and social progress (Government of India, 2022). Northeastern India's Arunachal Pradesh is home to a variety of tribes, languages and cultural traditions. Typically, these communities have been women's agricultural, forest-based livelihoods and household economies. With many differences, Arunachal Pradesh's tribal society offers to women greater mobility and visibility than the societies in which they live with patriarchy in other parts of India (Bhasin, 2007). But this seemingly free choice does not guarantee structural equality or empowerment. Women in Arunachal Pradesh are also actively involved in

productive activities but are discriminated against in accessing education, formal job, land ownership, and political participation. Such injustice in the form of inequalities has affected the overall development potential of the state. The concept of 'Viksit Arunachal' works towards economic growth, human development and social inclusion to achieve the vision of a developed region in the state. But persistent gender gaps are a big hurdle to realizing this vision.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the multidimensional gender gap in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To examine the socio-economic and cultural factors affecting gender inequality.
3. To assess the gender disparity and impact on achieving Viksit Arunachal.
4. To recommend policy options to enable gender-inclusive development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature for the purpose of knowing nature, extent and consequences of gender gap in Arunachal Pradesh. The data used is entirely secondary data, which is specific to

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the aim of structural patterns of gender inequality rather than perceptions at the individual level.

Secondary data was collected from reliable and authoritative sources such as reports from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4 and NFHS-5), Census data, published research papers, journal articles, books and reports of national and international organizations related to gender, tribal societies and development in the northeast region of India. The sources give inclusive data on the education, health, employment, property rights, political rights, and socio-economic status of women in Arunachal Pradesh.

The study uses a multidimensional analytical framework to the study of gender inequality in five major areas: education, economic participation, property ownership, political representation and health. To analyze patterns, trends and relationships that appear in the secondary data, a qualitative content analysis approach is used. To provide a window to women's situation in Arunachal Pradesh vis-à-vis the wider context of national and regional development, insights from the existing literature are drawn upon for comparison.

The methodology also has a development orientation, where gender inequality is connected with the overall vision of Viksit Arunachal. The study is based on an analysis of empirical evidence and theory, which it then synthesises to analyse the role of enduring gender gaps as structural barriers to inclusive and sustainable development. Findings are therefore arrived at by a systematic review, synthesis, and critical interpretation of established data, and not just obtained by primary fieldwork.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. GENDER GAP IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: DIMENSIONS

1.1 Educational Inequality

Education is a critical factor in influencing economic participation and empowerment. While the overall literacy rate has increased markedly in Arunachal Pradesh in the last several decades, gaps in literacy rates between males and female are evident in higher educational levels. Distance, lack of facilities and family duties prevent many rural/remote females from pursuing schooling beyond high school. Early school dropouts of girls continue to be a serious issue in tribal areas. Consequently, women are underrepresented in technical and professional education, and are less likely to have access to formal employment opportunities.

1.2 Employment Inequality in Agricultural Sector

The women of Arunachal Pradesh are actively involved in agriculture, horticulture, weaving and informal sector activities. But, they do not engage in formal jobs to a large extent. Male employment rate is much higher than female employment rate based on

NFHS data. Women's work may be unpaid or informal work, and it can be ignored in official economic figures. Women's economic progress is also hampered by restricted access to credit, skill-development initiatives and entrepreneurship opportunities. As a result, women's contribution to the economy is still undervalued for their vital role in sustaining rural livelihoods.

1.3 Property Rights and Asset Ownership

Ownership of property is an important indicator of economic empowerment. Women's rights of inheritance are limited by customary law in many tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh. Women have less access to productive assets and land, as it is usually inherited through male lines. Woman's bargaining power in the household and society is lower as a result of lack of ownership as explained by Agarwal (1994). If women do not have control over assets, they are unable to ensure their economic security and this helps to perpetuate intergenerational gender inequalities.

1.4 Political Representation

Although women are very active in community initiatives, they do not participate in political institutions. Women's presence in decision-making institutions is limited in many tribal communities due to traditional governance practices which are male-dominated. Women's contribution to local development activities is significant, while their involvement in formal political institutions like Legislative Assemblies and Councils is low. Such non-representation leads to under-representation of women's views in policy-making and governance.

1.5 Health and Nutrition

The government initiatives in maternal and child health have led to better health indicators among women in Arunachal Pradesh. The percentage of institutional deliveries has improved and awareness among people concerning reproductive health has also improved. But there are still obstacles that some women face, including limited access to healthcare facilities, limited nutrition and anemia. Such health inequalities impact on women's productivity and wellbeing, consequently limiting women's involvement in development processes.

2. GENDER INEQUALITY: SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEM

The socio-economic structures and cultural institutions have influenced gender inequities in Arunachal Pradesh. As mentioned, tribal societies in the state are considered to be more gender-egalitarian than other parts of India, but the empirical evidence reveals that women are still discriminated against in terms of education, employment, property rights, and decision-making (Mishra & Upadhyay, 2012). These inequalities are not an automatic consequence of individual discrimination but are entrenched in traditional laws and

practices, economic conditions and social norms which inform the role of women in society (Fernandes & Barbora, 2002).

2.1 Educational Disparities and Human Capital Constraints

Education inequity is one of the biggest socio-economic determinants of gender disparities in Arunachal Pradesh. Literacy rates have enhanced over the years, however, girls in rural and remote areas have been facing challenges like long distance to schools, poor infrastructure and responsibilities at home, which are limiting their education (NFHS-5, IIPS, 2021). Socio-economic factors like poverty, and the expectation of domestic work also have an impact on early dropouts among girls.

The study suggests that education has a direct impact on women's economic independence and lower levels of education among women directly affect their participation in formal employment and in a skill-based occupation. This leads to a vicious circle of low level human capital accumulation among women and perpetuates intergenerational inequality.

2.2 Economic Dependence and Labour Market Segmentation

The other important socio-economic issue is inequitable access of women to formal work. Women in Arunachal Pradesh are highly engaged in subsistence agriculture, forestry and in and around home activities, which are unpaid or underpaid in official statistics. Women make substantial contributions to livelihoods within the household, but this contribution is not captured in formal GDP systems.

Research indicates women's involvement in formal jobs is much lower than men's and lack of access to skill development, credit facilities and institutional employment opportunities is a major contributing factor for this (Bhasin, 2007). This division of the labour market further deepens economic dependence of women on the male members of the family, reducing their autonomy and bargaining power in the family.

2.3 Property Rights and Economic Asset Inequality

Another important socio-economic issue that contributes to gender inequality is the lack of equal property rights. In many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, land ownership and inheritance are based on custom, which is more favourable to males than females (Krishna, 2001). This means that women are deprived of the opportunity to own land or productive assets.

Land ownership is seen as a key determinant of the empowerment of women as it provides increased economic security, bargaining power and social status for women (Agarwal, 1994). In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, the lack of access to land makes it difficult for women to pursue agricultural or entrepreneurial

activities on their own, further perpetuating their economic dependency.

2.4 A limited access to financial institutions and entrepreneurship is a key constraint.

Women in Arunachal Pradesh are also hindered in accessing formal financial institutions like banks, credit and entrepreneurial support programmes. While Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have contributed to financial inclusion to a certain degree, structural challenges continue to hinder women's involvement in larger economic activities (Government of India, 2022). Women's entrepreneurial development is also hindered by the absence of collateral and low financial literacy, as well as limited mobility in remote areas.

2.5 Health and Nutrition inequalities

There is also gender-specific socio-economic factors that are health related. Women are more vulnerable to nutritional problems, anemia and reproductive health problems in Arunachal Pradesh, especially in rural and remote areas, where the healthcare facilities are scarce (IIPS, 2021). Illness further contributes to the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by women as they become less productive and less likely to participate in education as a result of poor health.

3. CULTURAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GENDER INEQUALITY

3.1 Customary Laws and Patriarchal Norms:

The third key element is that customary laws and patriarchal norms are still in effect. The role of the customary laws is one of the most powerful cultural factors which are responsible for the gender imbalance in Arunachal Pradesh. The tribal societies have traditional governance systems, where the inheritance, leadership, and authority are through the male line (Kodak, 2022). Many of these norms limit the role of women in formal decision making in family and community organisation.

The study by Mishra and Upadhyay (2012) shows that though the state has become modern, the customary institutions have also survived and are affecting gender relations in the state. In these institutions, the concept of gender roles is frequently structured in a manner that gives male authority and women are given domestic and supportive roles.

3.2 The division of labour by gender.

Females' role is also reinforced by cultural expectations of their roles. Traditionally, the roles of working in domestic chores, accessing child care, and subsistence agriculture fall to women, while men are more engaged in public, political and economic life. This gender based division of labour leads to reduced mobility, time availability and involvement in income generating activities for women (Bhasin, 2007).

3.3 Political Exclusion and Male-Dominated Governance Structures

But in recent studies of time-use patterns in India, it is also noted that women have far less education and employment opportunities because they spend a lot more time in unpaid domestic work than men (Janiso et al., 2021).

3.4 Public Choice Theory

But culture also has an impact on political participation. The governance systems of the tribal communities are also male-dominated, limiting women's involvement in decision-making processes in many cases, for example, by means of village council or customary institutions (Fernandes & Barbora 2002). However, traditional systems of authority and male-dominated kinship networks can hinder women's participation in grassroots governance in practice, even in the presence of women (Mishra et al., 2016). This omission means that the voice of women's interests is not heard in policy-making or development planning. Socio-cultural norms, marriage practices, and gender control are discussed here. This covers discussion on social norms, marriage practices and gender control.

Gender inequality also is shaped by marriage systems and kinship norms. In many communities, women's identity and social status is based on their role as a daughter, a wife or a mother rather than on their own. Male control of inheritance rights and the preservation of lineage continuity is further reinforced through marriage patterns and inheritance patterns. (Krishna, 2001)

Further, women's autonomy and social mobility is constrained by social stigma linked to divorce, widowhood or deviant gender roles.

3.5 Intersection of Ethnicity, Tradition, and Modernization

Modernization, ethnicity, and tradition intersect among the tribal society. Now, let's explore how ethnicity, tradition, and modernity overlap. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is ethnically diverse and gender relations are different among the various tribes. The modernisation and outside economic factors have not always decreased gender differences, though. Rather, inequalities have sometimes been embedded within their actions by bringing women into low paid informal labour market without changing the existing power dynamics (Mishra & Upadhyay, 2012). This way, tradition and modernity intersect, which results in a situation of gender inequality despite development.

Thus, it could be concluded that the socio-economic and cultural determinants of gender inequality in Arunachal Pradesh are intricately linked. Social and economic inequalities like unequal schooling, limited employment opportunities and property rights, and unequal access to finance, are reinforced by cultural inequalities like customs, norms and division of labour,

which are more likely to be gendered. The societies of the tribes in the area are not entirely equal; women are still disadvantaged and do not have a full say in the development process. To address these challenges, economic measures are needed, but also cultural change and institutional reforms to tackle gender inclusive development.

4. IMPACT OF GENDER GAP ON ACHIEVING VIKSIT ARUNACHAL

4.1 The different dimensions of the vision of Viksit Arunachal:

Viksit Arunachal, the vision of the state, is committed to making the state of Arunachal Pradesh a developed, inclusive and sustainable state, with the focus on improvement of human resources, infrastructure and economic productivity. Yet there is substantial gender inequality that will seriously restrict this developmental path. Women's capabilities are not optimally utilized, as a result of gender gaps in education, jobs, health status and property rights, as well as in political participation, which also impacts the overall development process. Gender inequality is considered as a social problem but also as a structural problem in the economy that directly influences long-term economic growth and human development outcomes (Mishra & Upadhyay, 2012).

4.2 Reduction of Human Capital formation

The gender gap has the greatest impact in human capital formation. Access to quality education, skill building and higher education opportunities for girls and women is insufficient, meaning the state is not fully utilizing nearly half its population. Although literacy has improved in Arunachal Pradesh, there still exists a divide in higher education and technical skill training particularly in rural and tribal regions (IIPS, 2021). This contributes to lower female representation in skilled occupations, thereby limiting the productivity and innovation potential.

Studies indicate that the contribution of human capital to long-term economic growth is one of the main factors behind that growth, and gender inequities in education harm a region's development potential (UNDP, 2020). Hence the gender disparity in education reduces the vision of knowledge based economy demanded for Viksit Arunachal.

4.3 Employment in the informal sector and the Unemployment Problem

Women's underutilization of labour resources causes substantial economic inefficiency because of gender inequality. Women in Arunachal Pradesh actively involve in agriculture, forestry and weaving and also in the informal sector, but the majority of these activities go unnoticed and uncompensated in formal economic system (Bhasin, 2007). It may be noted that women's role in the livelihoods of the households is significant but not reflected in GDP.

4.4 Economic Loss and Underutilization of Labour Force

Economy loses out on potential gains in productivity when women are not part of the formal economy and entrepreneurial systems. Evidence from the developing world demonstrates that gender disparities in labour force participation can have a substantial impact on GDP growth (World Bank, 2018). For Arunachal Pradesh, this translates to a more gradual industrial growth, less growth in service industries and less economic diversification.

4.5 Vulnerability to Natural Disasters and Emergencies

Governance quality and institutional effectiveness are also negatively affected by gender inequality. Gender-sensitive policies are not included in development planning because of women's underrepresentation in political institutions, including in local governance bodies and decision making. Though the provisions of the Constitution, like Panchayati Raj reservations, have led to more participation in some places, the traditional and customary institutions are still male-dominated (Fernandes & Barbora, 2002). Research shows that increased women's involvement in governance increases transparency, decreases corruption, and increases the allocation of public resources for health, education and welfare services (UN Women, 2021). Hence, the exclusion of women in decision making positions in Arunachal Pradesh has impact on the effectiveness of governance and effectiveness of policies, which in turn affects the Viksit Arunachal.

4.6 Intergenerational and Social inequalities

There is evidence that the gap in inequality between generations is closing. There is evidence of diminishing intergenerational inequalities. The existence of a gender gap is a major driver of intergenerational poverty. In the absence of female involvement in the workforce, education and ownership of property, poor nutrition, child illiteracy and poor health are among the negative effects on household welfare. Women spend a higher percentage of their income on the welfare of their families than men do, which gives empowerment effects on human development a higher multiplier effect (Duflo, 2012). Due to limited access to land ownership and financial resources, women in Arunachal Pradesh continue to lack the opportunity to establish economic security, thus remaining dependent on men within the household (Agarwal, 1994). This perpetuates rather than overcomes intergenerational poverty and langares in inclusive development.

One major consequence of the gender gap is the lack of development of entrepreneurship and innovation among women. Self Help Groups (SHGs) have heightened the economic participation of women at the micro level, but there are challenges in securing credit, markets and business networks for women (Government of India, 2022). If women entrepreneurs are not

supported, they are stuck with low value, subsistence level activities.

This restricts the growth of small and medium industries (SMEs) which plays a significant role in economic diversification in Arunachal Pradesh. Lack of women entrepreneurs also means low innovation potential and less capability to the local economy to adjust to the economic changes in the world.

4.7 Health inequalities and loss of productivity

Access to health is also imbalanced by gender, impacting development outcomes. The problems faced by the women population of the rural and remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh include limited health care infrastructure, malnourishment, and reproductive health problems (IIPS, 2021). Women's health condition hinders them from working effectively and adds to the economic burden of households.

Gender inequities in health have been found to lower labour force participation and raise dependency levels, consequently stunting economic growth. On the longer term, it is in the interest of human development index and economic competitiveness.

4.8 Social Exclusion and Weak Human Development Index (HDI)

Gender inequality is a direct determinant of lower outcomes of human development. Education, income and health indicators are all significant factors in the Human Development Index and are all influenced by gender differences. Excluding women from equal participation in these sectors has an impact on reducing the growth of the overall HDI (UNDP, 2020).

The social marginalisation of women in the field of leadership, inheritance and decision-making in Arunachal Pradesh compromises their agency and social development in general. This delay reduces the progress towards achieving the inclusive development objectives of the vision of Viksit Arunachal.

4.9 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Slower Rate

The gender gap is also a direct impact on the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). These targets are interdependent, and without achieving gender equality, the other development targets are difficult to make a dent in (United Nations, 2015). Hence, gender inequality puts a restriction on the development of various sectors of development at the same time.

Thus, the study reveals that the gender gap is multidimensional and has a negative effect on the realization of the vision of Viksit Arunachal. It dampens human capital formation, hampers the economic productivity, curtails the effectiveness of governance and

blights intergenerational inequality. It also limits entrepreneurship, innovation, and health outcomes and stifles development overall. Thus, gender equality is not just a social goal, but also an economic imperative in order to realize the vision of a developed Arunachal Pradesh. If gender inequalities in structure are not addressed, then the vision of Viksit Arunachal will be incomplete.

5. POLICY MEASURES FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Gender-inclusive development:

Gender inclusive development is a pivotal enabler for realizing the vision of Viksit Arunachal. Although there has been progress in education, health and livelihood conditions, women are still faced with structural challenges in employment and property rights, in political participation and in access to financial resources, etc. in Arunachal Pradesh. Such disparities lead to sub-optimal utilisation of human capital and lower development outcomes. There are compelling empirical arguments that gender equality is linked to higher economic growth and better human development and governance indicators (Duflo, 2012; World Bank, 2018). Thus, specific policy action is needed to bring women into participation in development process.

5.2 Development of women's education and skill development in a way that enhances their strength and capability:

The enhancement of women education at various levels in general and in rural and tribal areas in particular is one of the most important policy measures. While there have been improvements in literacy rates in this state, dropouts of girls do continue to pose a challenge, as they are often forced to leave school because of distance, poverty and household responsibilities (IIPS, 2021). So the government has to increase residential schools, and offer transport in remote areas and safe school environments for girls.

Besides, skill development initiatives must be aimed at women, specifically to enhance their employability in the traditional and new sectors. Research indicates that investing in girls' education and skills has a high economic development and household welfare multiplier effect (UNICEF, 2022). Enhancing women's involvement in the modern workforce through the introduction of digital literacy, STEM education and vocational training are a good sign. But it is slow.

5.3 Increase the economic empowerment of women through SHGs and Entrepreneurship:

An important policy thrust is to boost women's economic involvement through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and entrepreneurship development initiatives. SHGs have been proven to be effective tools for financial inclusion and rural livelihood creation, especially for women, by the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM).

But, SHGs have to move from being micro-credit groups to the full-fledged enterprise development platforms. Women need to be encouraged to break into other avenues of activities that offer value addition like agro-processing, handicrafts, tourism and digital services. Women businesses need access to institutional credit, marketing linkages and business incubation centres to grow their businesses.

Evidence indicates that women's economic empowerment leads to higher household incomes, better nutrition for children and better local economies (World Bank, 2018). Thus, entrepreneurship policies should include women as the main beneficiaries.

5.4 Customary laws and reforming property rights:

One of the significant structural challenges in the scenario of gender equality in Arunachal Pradesh is access to land and ownership of property. In most tribal societies the rights of women to productive assets are restricted by the customary inheritance systems, which are more beneficial to the male than to the female (Agarwal, 1994). When there are no property rights, women are not economically independent and are quite helpless socially.

Policy changes should focus on aligning customary laws with constitutional provision for gender equality. The legal system should be respectful to tribal customs and practices while guaranteeing women's equal rights to property rights, including rights to inheritance and transfer, and ownership. Legal literacy and awareness raising programmes are also required for women to be aware of their rights and to claim them. Research has demonstrated that women's bargaining power, financial security, and autonomy in decision-making in households is directly related to land ownership (Agarwal, 1994). Hence, the need to reform the property rights for long-term gender-inclusive development.

5.5 Aims to improve political representation and leadership:

The government needs to do more to engage women in the governance process in order to ensure gender-responsive governance. Women are actively involved in community level activities, but their presence in formal political institutions is limited. For inclusive governance, women's leadership in the Panchayati Raj level and in the village councils needs to be strengthened.

Improving women's political participation can be enhanced through capacity building, leadership development and reservation policies. Research indicates that women leaders put more resources into health, education and welfare services and consequently have positive impacts on development outcomes (UN Women, 2021).

The participation of women in decision making structures will help to ensure that the development policies in Arunachal Pradesh are reflective of the needs of all sections in society.

5.6 Enhancing access to nutritional and health care services:

To promote gender-inclusive development, robust investments in women's health and nutrition are essential. Anemia, maternal health risk, and access to quality health services are some of the issues faced by women in remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh (IIPS, 2021). It is critical to build up primary healthcare centres, mobile medical units and maternal health services.

Reproductive health education and nutrition programmes for adolescent girls should be given special attention. Improvements in health directly improve women's productivity and participation in education and employment, thus contributing to overall development (WHO, 2022).

5.7 Promotes gender-sensitive infrastructure and safety

A gender sensitive approach to infrastructure development is required. Women are present in public life if they can be transported safely, attend schools, work in secure jobs, and use digital technology. Women's restricted mobility and economic involvement in rural areas are due to lack of transport facilities and safety issues.

Gender sensitive public transportation, safe hostel facilities for students and community based safety mechanisms are all part of the policy interventions that should be put. This helps to minimize the obstacles to mobility and enhances the access of women to education and employment opportunities.

5.8 Promote digital inclusion and financial literacy

Digital exclusion is a major obstacle in women empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh. Providing access to smartphones, internet connection and digital literacy training will allow women to access digital education, e-commerce and financial services.

Financial literacy initiatives for women should also be scaled up to enable them to handle the aspects of saving, accessing credit, and conducting business activities. The evidence suggests that digital and financial inclusion has a positive impact on the economic independence and decision making power of women (World Bank, 2020).

5.9 Gender-Inclusive Governance and Policy Action

For the development to be gender inclusive, there must be institutional arrangements which make the development processes gender responsive. Gender budgeting should be used on a departmental level throughout the organisation to ensure that they can benefit women equally in terms of public expenditure.

Gender disaggregated data should be compiled, incorporated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks and used to measure the impact of the development schemes. This provides accountability, and enhances the effectiveness of the policies in tackling gender inequality.

FINDINGS

The analysis reveals that gender inequality is a major obstacle to achieve the vision of Viksit Arunachal. Despite the progress the State of Arunachal Pradesh has achieved in various development sectors, structural inequalities are still limiting the full participation of women in economic, political and social life. Women are a key and underutilised group of people whose empowerment is crucial for sustainable development. Thus, transforming the economy as the condition of the Viksit Arunachal is not enough; there is a need for the deep restructuring of the society to come up with a gender equality in all aspects of life.

Gender gap is still a key hurdle in realizing vision of Viksit Arunachal in Arunachal Pradesh. The state has improved access to education, health and social participation, but structural inequalities are still evident in the labour market, access to property, representation in decision-making and economic empowerment. The female population is an important but underused part of the populace.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some limitations were acknowledged in the study.

While the study makes an analytical contribution, it has some limitations which need to be recognized. First, all the research is secondary data, which limits the possibilities to get to the "micro" level of realities, lived experiences, and subjective perceptions of women from various tribal communities. Given the lack of primary field surveys or interviews, there is limited scope to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of household life and local variations in gender relations at the household level.

Secondly, the study is based on state level data which may not have captured important inter-tribal, regional and rural-urban variations at the Andhra Pradesh level. Inter-gender relationships were found to be very diverse among tribal groups and because of data limitations, inter-gender relationships could not be explored in detail.

Third, secondary data sources (e.g. NFHS and Census reports) are reliable, but have limited granularity and are only updated regularly, and may not necessarily capture the latest changes in socio-economic conditions, policy changes or trends in women's empowerment at ground level.

Fourth, the study tends to be at the structural and institutional level of analysis and does not quantify the causal linkages between gender gaps and development outcomes. Consequently, the analysis is basically descriptive and interpretative and rather than econometric or predictive.

Lastly, Arunachal Pradesh is not compared with other northeastern states and/or national averages to further enhance the understanding of the relative position of the state in terms of gender equality.

In spite of these constraints, the study offers an all-inclusive and policy-relevant picture of gender inequality in Arunachal Pradesh and identifies issues of concern that need to be addressed for realizing the dream of a Viksit Arunachal.

CONCLUSION

To realize the vision of Viksit Arunachal, gender-inclusive development is crucial. The policy options and interventions introduced from education and employment to property rights, political participation, healthcare, and digital inclusion emphasize the need for a multi-dimensional perspective on the fight against gender inequality. Research from across the world and across the nation indicates that women's empowerment brings increased economic growth, better human development and better governance systems. Hence, bridging the gender gap becomes a social need, as well as a development strategy in Arunachal Pradesh.

Hence, there is need to move away from welfare and towards empowering development strategies to achieve Viksit Arunachal. Gender equality must be deemed as a social goal and an essential economic need. The target of developed Arunachal will be incomplete if gender gap is not bridged.

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