

Assessing the Performance of Sabarkantha District in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality

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Introduction

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right, but a necessary condition for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. **Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)**, established by the United Nations, focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The goal includes ending discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls while ensuring equal participation in political, economic, and social spheres. **Empowering women and girls** has been proven to accelerate economic growth, improve health outcomes, and foster more inclusive and resilient societies. This paper aims to assess the **performance of Sabarkantha District** in achieving **SDG 5: Gender Equality**, drawing comparisons with the state of Gujarat, national averages, and top-performing districts such as Tapi.

The study also highlights the areas where Sabarkantha lags behind and provides recommendations to address the gaps, in line with SDG 5's core objectives of ensuring gender equality and empowering women and girls in all areas of life.

Objective of the Research

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To evaluate Sabarkantha District's performance against key indicators of SDG 5: Gender Equality.

- To compare Sabarkantha's gender equality performance with Gujarat's state average, national standards, and top-performing districts like Tapi.
- To identify the key challenges in achieving gender equality in Sabarkantha.
- To recommend policy measures and strategies for improving gender equality in Sabarkantha, in alignment with SDG 5.

Methodology

This study utilizes secondary data from government reports, including the Census of India (2011), National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), and data from the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB). A comparative analysis approach is employed to assess the performance of Sabarkantha across eight key gender-related indicators. The performance of Sabarkantha is compared with Gujarat's state averages, national targets, and the top-performing districts to determine areas requiring intervention.

Key Indicators of Gender Equality in Sabarkantha

Eight indicators (8) have been identified as per district data availability to measure district level performance in terms of the goal-5(Annexure table-05), As per state SDG Index, the score of Gujarat is 53.02 as on October 2023, which varies between 41 to 77 across the

districts. Sabarkantha district stands at 23 rank with 50.03 index score. Tapi District is the top performing districts among all with index score 76.03

The performance of Sabarkantha in relation to SDG 5: Gender Equality is measured using the following eight indicators:

Indicator	Sabarkantha Value	Gujarat Average	National Average	Top District	Target for 2030
Female Literacy Rate	65.27%	69.68%	70.3%	Vadodara (80.97%)	95%
Sex Ratio at Birth	844	910	970	Ahmedabad (993)	970
Women Aged 20-24 Married Before Age 18	27%	21.8%	N/A	Jamnagar (6.8%)	20%
Proportion of Seats Held by Women in State Legislation	-	8.24%	N/A	Narmada (50%)	50%
Rate of Crimes Against Women (per 100,000 females)	26.5	22.1	N/A	Tapi (3.82)	0
Conviction Rate for Crimes Involving Women	0%	7.35%	40%	Valsad (18.18%)	40%
Proportion of Crimes Against Women to Total Crime	1.05%	1%	N/A	Vadodara (0.19%)	0
Proportion of Cases Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act	0.79%	0.27%	0%	N/A	0%

Sabarkantha faces several significant challenges in achieving gender equality. The female literacy rate in Sabarkantha (65.27%) is lower than both the state average (69.68%) and the national average (70.3%). This disparity highlights the need to prioritize improving education for women, especially in rural areas. The sex ratio at birth in the district (844) is far below the state average (910) and the national target of 970, indicating persistent gender bias and the need for stricter enforcement of laws against sex-selective abortions, along with comprehensive awareness campaigns. Additionally, early marriage is a major concern, with 27% of women aged 20-24 married before 18, significantly exceeding

the state average (21.8%) and national target (20%). Addressing this requires stricter law enforcement, community outreach programs, and education on the negative effects of early marriage.

The lack of women's political representation is another challenge, with Sabarkantha having 0% representation in state legislation, well below the state average (8.24%) and the 50% target for 2030. To improve this, it is crucial to promote female candidates and encourage women's participation in politics. Furthermore, the crime rate against women in Sabarkantha (26.5 per 100,000 females) is significantly higher than the state average

(22.1) and Tapi's rate (3.82), indicating a high prevalence of gender-based violence. This calls for improved law enforcement, better protection for women, and public awareness campaigns. The district's conviction rate for crimes involving women is alarmingly low at 0%, far below the state average (7.35%) and national target of 40%, which suggests systemic issues within the justice system. Strengthening the judicial system, enhancing police training, and providing victim support services are essential to improving this rate.

Moreover, the proportion of crimes against women to total crime in Sabarkantha (1.05%) is slightly above the state average (1%), showing that women are disproportionately affected by crime in the district. A comprehensive crime prevention strategy is needed to address this issue. Finally, the proportion of child marriage cases in Sabarkantha (0.79%) is higher than the state average (0.27%), signaling the continued need for policies and interventions to eliminate child marriage and protect girls' rights and opportunities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for achieving gender equality in the district and aligning with the objectives of SDG 5.

Key Challenges in Achieving Gender Equality in Sabarkantha

Sabarkantha faces several key challenges in achieving gender equality. The female literacy rate (65.27%) is lower than both the state (69.68%) and national averages (70.3%), limiting women's access to education and opportunities. The high prevalence of early marriage, with 27% of women aged 20-24 married before 18, restricts girls' education and economic independence. Gender-based violence remains a significant issue, with a high crime rate against women (26.5 per 100,000

females), indicating inadequate law enforcement and victim support. Women's political representation is virtually nonexistent (0%), highlighting a lack of female participation in decision-making. The district's sex ratio at birth (844) indicates ongoing gender bias, especially through sex-selective practices. Additionally, the conviction rate for crimes involving women is disturbingly low (0%), pointing to systemic flaws in the justice system.

Policy Measures and Strategies for Improving Gender Equality

To address these challenges, Sabarkantha can implement several targeted schemes to improve gender equality. First, to tackle the female literacy rate, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme should be expanded, offering scholarships and incentives for girls' education, especially in rural areas. Additionally, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme could be optimized to ensure that girls stay in school by providing nutritional support, reducing absenteeism. To combat early marriage, the district can strengthen the Child Marriage Prohibition Act with better enforcement and introduce community-level programs like the Balika Samriddhi Yojana, which provides financial support to girls who remain unmarried and continue their education. For gender-based violence, schemes like the One-Stop Crisis Centre could be established to offer immediate legal, medical, and psychological support to victims of violence. Furthermore, promoting women's political participation could be achieved through the Mahila Swasthya Adhikar Scheme, which can be expanded to train women for leadership

roles and encourage them to run for local office. To improve the conviction rate for crimes involving women, the Nirbhaya Fund could be better utilized to enhance police and judicial training, ensuring faster and fairer trials for gender-based crimes. Lastly, for addressing gender bias, the district can implement the Gender Sensitization Program in schools, government offices, and communities to challenge patriarchal norms and promote equality.

of Sustainable Development Goals with a Focus on Gender Equality in Gujarat. NITI Aayog, Government of India.

By integrating these schemes into the district's existing frameworks, Sabarkantha can make significant progress in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in line with SDG 5.

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