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Redefining Gender Roles for Social Sustainability-Bridging Equality, Diversity and Ecofeminism

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Abstract

In the pursuit of comprehending social sustainability, with primary attention on gender as a crucial element woven into the theoretical framework, it is imperative to grasp the expectations associated with the term gender, and it involves understanding the anticipated roles and attributes linked to the term 'Gender' and acknowledging its multifaceted diversity. The objective of this paper is to explore the responsibilities that men and women and third gender play in establishing a distinctive stability defined by social norms. In this context, distinctive stability refers to a balance between present needs and future requirements of society. The paper proposes a middle-ground approach that reconciles against dichotomous gender perspective to build a sustainable framework and find a new array to the ideal society. It sheds light on gender-related social issues and examines resources from diverse fields to empower individuals. This research paper will also concentrate on essential key terms such as equality, diversity, the environment, and Ecofeminism, among others. These terms require investigation by establishing distinct connections and examining their impacts on social sustainability. This research aims to identify the obstacles that prevent any gender from fulfilling their societal roles, ultimately resulting in social unsustainability. A comprehensive study of social sustainability necessitates an exploration of the elements that contribute to social unsustainability, and this paper will explore those elements.

Keywords

Social Sustainability, Gender, Third Gender, Social Unsustainability, Equality, Diversity, Ecofeminism, Environment, Social Roles, Expectations of Society, Elements of Social Sustainability.

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Social Sustainability: Understanding and Importance -

Sustainability involves achieving equilibrium among various factors. In the context of social sustainability, its core strength lies in its dynamic framework, requiring a thorough comprehension for effective implementation. Social sustainability is defined by the capacity of human societies to fulfill their current requirements while ensuring that future generations can satisfy their own needs without compromise. Social sustainability is a process for creating sustainable, successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places in which they live and work. (understanding and measuring social sustainability).

Achieving sustainable development requires gender equality, not only as a human right. As outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender inequality hampers economic growth, the realization of gender equality, and the achievement of sustainable development. Furthermore, gender gaps limit or restrict women's access to resources and decision-making opportunities, which in turn hinders sustainable development and livelihoods. In some cases, the use of violence against women can reinforce power imbalances and gender inequality by limiting resources and opportunities.

Society emerges from the amalgamation of diverse ideas among individuals, necessitating an equilibrium encompassing various aspects such as needs, health, communication, equality, education, and justice to advance toward a prosperous future. Failure to manage these elements could potentially lead to a deteriorating future. The choice of direction lies in our hands. We never realize how Generations change slowly; Well-structured sustainability can work as bones to the whole body where people feel safety, peace, and happiness. To attain the fundamental components of a contented world, social sustainability is imperative. It is therefore crucial to understand how gender roles shape social sustainability and vice versa. Gender roles are the socially constructed expectations and norms that define what men and women should do, think, feel, and value in different contexts. The way people interact with each other and with their environment is significantly affected by their gender roles. These roles are influenced by a variety of factors, including culture, religion, education, media, politics, and history. As an example, gender roles can affect how people access food security, health care, education, employment, income distribution, and political participation.

The Urgency for Social Reflection and Evolution in a Syndemic World.-

Establishing the initial creation of society sets the groundwork, but complexity emerges in continuously refining and sustaining a well-organized structure that must evolve with the demands of the times. Over recent years, our

global landscape has undergone profound transformations, notably marked by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent conflicts between nations. This era has evolved into a Syndemic world, where communities grapple simultaneously with viral outbreaks and ongoing warfare. Those fortunate enough to remain unaffected by these pervasive challenges seem oblivious to their shared connection with the planet. Our tendency to ignorance and self-will is the root cause of social unsustainability. Unfortunately, we have never attempted to alter the social framework over time and passed the old ideology without modifications to the next generation, Generation Z, also known as Gen Z. It is essential to understand our existence by recognizing that all humans are one single unit - composed of atoms, running blood in veins, and our power - the brain. Contemplating ideas doesn't imply misguided beliefs. It presents an opportunity to foster sustainability, building an exemplary society where individuals prioritize mutual care. Prioritizing thoughtful consideration before undertaking any actions is crucial in this pursuit. It begins with our capacity to contemplate rather than accept them unquestioningly.

People do not think critically enough. People assume too many things to be true without sufficient basis in that belief, it's very important that people closely analyze what is supposed to be true, and build it up, and analyze things by the first principles, not by analogy or convention, which is actually what most people do, that makes it difficult to gain insight as to how things can be bettered. (Elon Musk - These Insights From Elon Musk (Billionaire) Will Change How You Do Business)

Distinction between Sex and Gender -

Gender roles encompass various elements, signifying responsibilities and expectations placed on individuals. However, it is essential to clear the roots of the term "gender" itself, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping social sustainability. Therefore, there remains a need for a clear understanding of this concept, as people frequently encounter confusion between the terms "sex" and "gender" in the realm of development. Sex and gender are different concepts. Sex is a Biological concept, determined on the basis of individuals' primary sex characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics that people ascribe to different sexes. (Blackstone). Sex refers to what is biological and gender to what is cultural (Goldstein)

There are three main categories of gender: Male, Female, and Third Gender. The Third Gender category includes individuals who do not identify with traditional binary classifications. Equal gender rights and responsibilities are crucial for sustainability, regardless of societal norms or self-identification.

Three Pillars of Social Sustainability -

The three-pillar conception of (social, economic and environmental)

sustainability, commonly represented by three intersecting circles with overall sustainability at the center, has become ubiquitous (Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins). The three dimensions of sustainability reveal a clear bias towards men, perpetuating a historical trend where masculinity is associated with power. It has led to the establishment of a patriarchal societal structure, where women are subjected to mental and physical oppression by men. Lack of acceptance for the third gender hinders growth and causes social instability. At times, men also encounter baseless accusations made by women, and society tends to hold them accountable without engaging in thoughtful consideration. Therefore, mutual acceptance among genders is necessary, prioritizing humanity above all. A contextual understanding of gender also recognizes how performances of masculinity, femininity and androgyny differ from culture to culture, generation to generation and even person to person. (Accepting Gender: An ACT Workbook for Trans and Non-Binary People,2023)

Communal acceptance can initiate a positive shift among genders when individuals recognize their gender based on personal feelings and emotions rather than conforming to societal impositions. After the initial phase of acceptance, it is crucial to cultivate a culture of respect that conscientiously acknowledges and honors each other's existence and then provides opportunities in various fields - such as Education and jobs.

Gender-related social issues (Sustainability barriers) and Solutions-

The key to achieving social sustainability lies in unity among all people. It's not just about creation but also about maintenance. Several critical factors related to gender issues impede overall sustainability within society. Equity plays a vital role in social sustainability, yet it remains elusive as it entails empowering all genders collectively. In this context, while men enjoy the freedom to move and act without restrictions, women often face limitations. Moreover, even within marriage, instances of marital rape reflect a scenario where women endure suffering due to the perception of men asserting control over their bodies Ultimately, this results in an increase in population, and the issue of consumption emerges, giving rise to challenges in achieving social sustainability. On the other hand, the ideology of "Ecofeminism" depicts women cultivating a connection with nature, contributing to social sustainability by presenting themselves as distinct individuals. Although feminist scholars (Ecofeminists in particular) have been concerned with the state of the natural environment for several decades, it is only recently that some have taken up directly the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development. (MacGregor) In society, the term "man" is often treated as a plural entity rather than its plural form, "men." When an individual man commits a crime, the entire male population is considered unfairly stigmatized. Some boys experience fear around girls due to a lack of

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perceived safety in certain situations. In instances of conflict, societal bias may favor girls, even when they are at fault. Boys also feel emotional distress, but societal expectations never allow them to express vulnerability, such as crying, as it is traditionally associated with girls, which illustrates the imposition of societal norms on individuals, aiming to instill a perception of masculinity within them. French Philosopher Louis Althusser talks about a term called Interpellation.

Interpellation expresses the idea that an idea is not simply yours alone (such as "I like blue, I always have") but rather an idea that has been presented to you for you to accept. (Althusser) Communication challenges between genders are common, and fostering positive thinking becomes essential for achieving clarity. When addressing gender issues holistically, prioritizing practical education over theoretical concepts is crucial. Each individual should value stage performance as a means of personal growth. Breaking down gender stereotypes in communication is a significant stride toward resolving gender problems. The recognition of a third gender remains a contentious issue, yet the inclusion of transgender population data in the 2011 census for India can be viewed as a notable step towards acceptance. In addition, the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) disclosed the aggregate count of students who enrolled for the examinations in the year 2020.

THE YEAR 2020	Total Number of Registered Students	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Number of Transgender Students
Class X	18,89,878	11.01.664	7,88,195	19
Class XII	12,06,893	6,84,068	5,22,819	6

(Source: NDTV, 2020 Feb 14, 2020) (Inclusion of Transgender Children in School Education)

But, the biggest problem is "Trans-phobia" which Refers to the discomfort, fear, or hatred of transgender and gender-nonconforming people. Trans-phobia is found in natal families, educational institutions, workplaces, healthcare institutions, and in society as a whole. (Inclusion of Transgender Children in School Education). Some points can be implemented to achieve Social Sustainability

- Imposing gender on individuals is not appropriate as it results in artificial identity and unwarranted responsibilities. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and embrace one's authentic gender identity.
- Acceptance of one's authentic identity is the solution, rather than negating any gender.
- Ensuring equal opportunities for all genders contributes to the establishment of a sustainable social environment.

- Gender should not be a societal taboo, as it leads to instability and issues such as "transphobia."

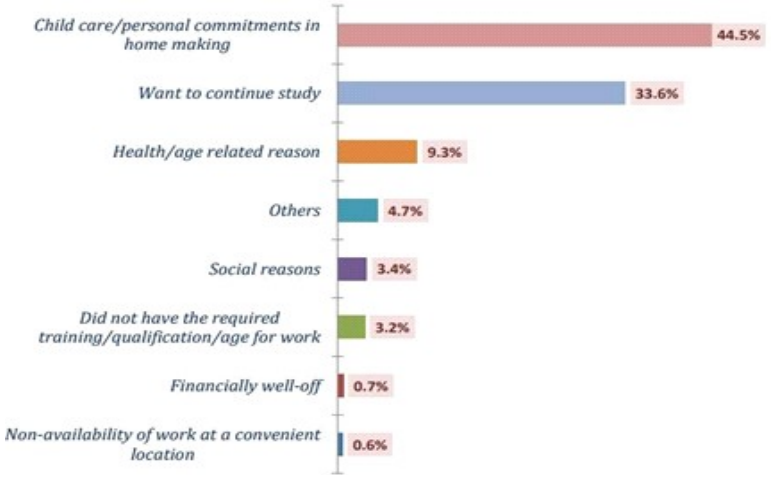
Global Gender Gaps and Gender Parity

The term was introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2016. The Global Gender Gap refers to differences between men and women in terms of economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment measured by the World Economic Forum through the Global Gender Gap Index. According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index no country has yet achieved full gender parity, although the top nine countries (Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Nicaragua, Namibia and Lithuania) have closed at least 80% of their gap. For the 14th Year running, Iceland (91.2%) takes the top position. It also continues to be the only country to have closed more than 90% of its gender gap. (Global Gender Gap Report 2023) Gender parity concerns relative equality in terms of numbers and proportions of women and men, girls and boys, and is often calculated as the ratio of female-to-male values for a given indicator. (European Institute for Gender Equality)

Gender Parity and Social Sustainability

Gender parity establishes a framework for equal opportunities across all genders, guiding the creation of a sustainable environment. In this context, distinct roles can be assigned to each gender, fostering contributions in various fields and cultivating social sustainability. This envisioned state entails a society marked by happiness and well-being, effectively warding off unsustainability. Ensuring equitable opportunities becomes pivotal, necessitating an initial emphasis on constructive thinking and an optimistic outlook. By instilling comfort and innovative ideas, we lay the foundation for future generations to perpetuate social sustainability.

Statistics Reports -



Source: Annual PLFS Report, MoSPI

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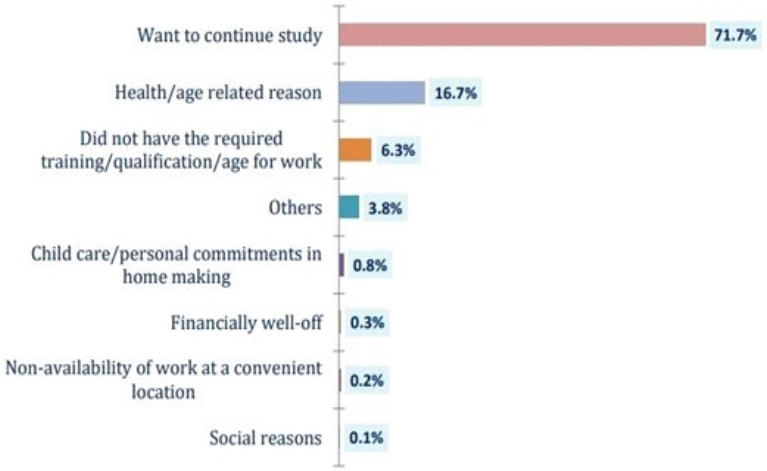
Reasons Reported by Females (in %) for not being in the labor force

According to Employment Statistics in Focus- April 2023 - women, who are outside the labor force, around 44.5% of women, were not in the labor force due to "Child care/personal commitments in homemaking" and 33.6% of women want to continue their study instead of joining labor force. Around 3.4% of women were outside the labor force due to "social reasons".



Source: Annual PLFS Report, MoSPI

Reasons Reported by Males (in %) for not being in the labor force

The main reason for men not being in the labor force was continuation of their studies. Around 71.7% of men wanted to continue their studies and it keeps them outside the labor force (Employment Statistics in Focus-April 2023.)

Therefore, social sustainability is influenced by various factors specific to different genders. Certain elements include responsibility and opportunity, where the sequence begins with the availability of opportunities, followed by individual decisions that ultimately shape the resulting responsibilities. In this context, Third gender is somewhere affected due to unavailability of opportunity in any field.

As per 2011 census data, India's third gender population consists of 490,000 people, out of which a handful of them only make it to gainful employment (Transgenders and employment in India: Opening doors of opportunities for Transgenders) The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 in India grants protection and rights to third-gender individuals. Another aspect that touches the factor of sustainability is the use of resources, to which sustainability is Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (United Nations Brundtland Commission- Sustainability)

Fulfilling intergenerational needs requires a strong link between present and future generations. Recycling resources creates a highly efficient model of social sustainability. Through recycling, waste is turned into a resource and production input. This approach looks at the complete life cycle of a resource – from extraction of the raw materials to product design, production, and consumption and all the way through to waste management, such as collection and recycling (Pegels).

Nevertheless, factors such as ignorance and the rise in population can deplete numerous resources, leading to social unsustainability. This scenario poses a threat, leaving insufficient resources for generations. Hence, each gender needs to understand its existing resources, and on the other hand, controlling population growth is essential to alleviate excessive consumption. Achieving this is feasible when women have control over their reproductive rights, and men comprehend their responsibilities towards society.

According to Novel laureate Amartya Sen Social Sustainability has five dimensions – Equity, Diversity, Social Cohesion, Quality of life, and Democracy and governance (ESG).

Social sustainability is fostered by cultural variations that give rise to diversity, bringing together individuals with different backgrounds and knowledge. This diversity sparks creativity, contributing to societal development. When cultural diversity leads to conflicts, it can cause social instability. In 2015, the Indian Government launched a campaign "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" which has led to positive shifts in people's thought patterns. There might be other parallel campaign of society like "Beto ko kaabil banao" and "Rojgaar sabka adhikar" could be useful. These initiatives have the power to alter perspectives, and the foundation of these shifts lies in fostering sustainable thinking. Both genders need to work together to achieve sustainability.

Any serious shift towards more sustainable societies has to include gender equality (Clark).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, to fulfill all the elements of social sustainability: no discrimination, proper interaction, equality, medical system, critical thinking, respect, and understanding, and to use all the resources for present needs as well as future requirements. In environmental sustainability, we must prioritize nature, and each individual must take responsibility to create a healthy environment for future generations. Society undergoes dynamic transformations as it engages in critical thinking. The factors that contribute to social unsustainability require a fresh perspective that can create a new world for future generations. Instead of imposing outdated ideologies on them, we should strive to build a healthy and happy society

based on innovation and dynamic results. It will be bridging the gap between generations. It is essential to recognize that newborns are oblivious to concepts such as identity, gender, nationality, and religion. We impose our beliefs on them, leaving them in a world of chaos based on these notions.

The key to sustainability is our capacity to responsibly manage and preserve all existing resources—whether material or intellectual—and pass them on to the succeeding generation in alignment with their needs. We need to understand and adapt to the ever-changing nature of time. A comprehensive understanding of social sustainability necessitates recognizing its close connection with social unsustainability. The two are intricately connected, and addressing one without the other would be incomplete and ineffective, with gender emerging as a pivotal factor influencing societal structures and serving as a source of distinction across generations of varying age groups. Ensuring equal opportunities for all genders is crucial for sustainability. Stereotypes and norms should not hinder any gender from feeling safe in the social structure. Finally, gender roles must be seen as an individual decision to feel about their gender as Simone de Beauvoir once said One is not born a woman, but becomes one (Beauvoir). Society assigns gender roles, but individuals can choose their gender based on their feelings which creates a new mentality and contributes to sustainability.

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