Essay question: How should an understanding of gender inequality inform the design and delivery of policies to promote global development?

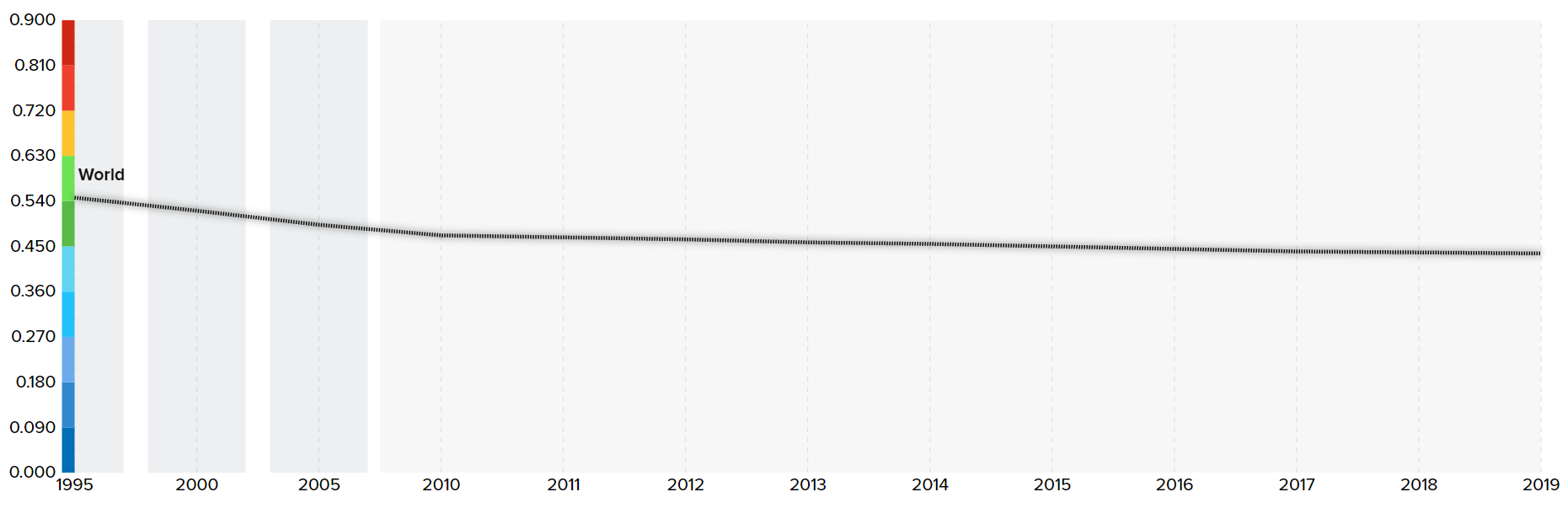
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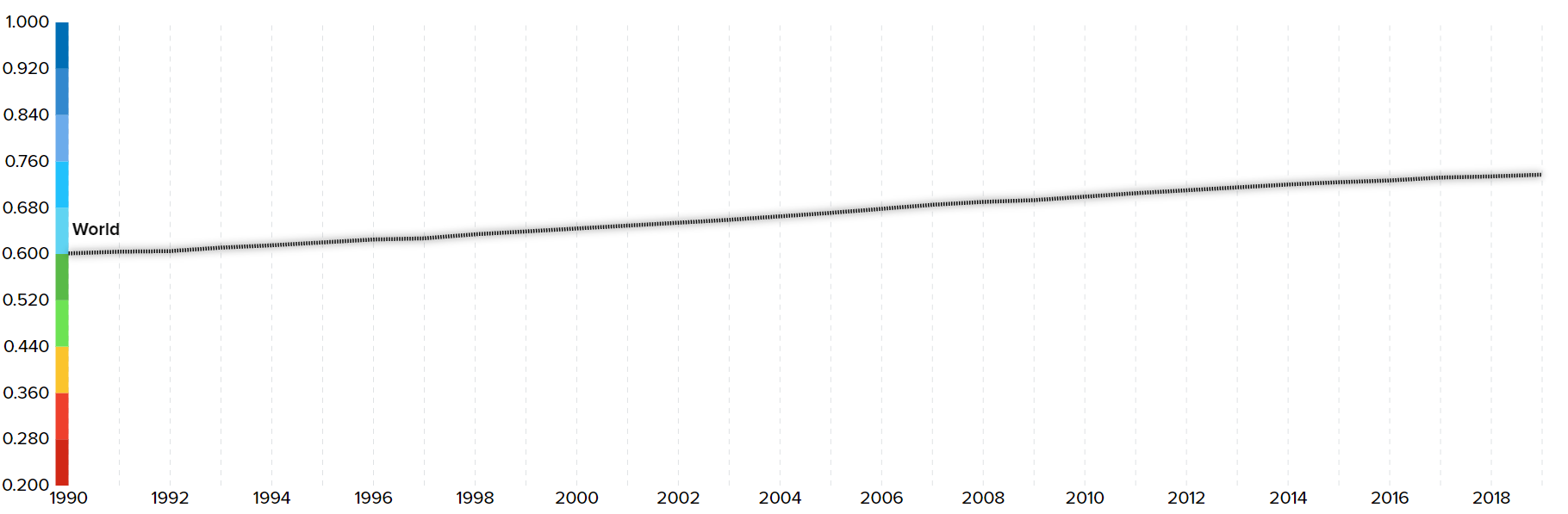
## Introduction

Gender disparity pervades the world, and its persistence stymies global development initiatives. Nomoto (2017, p.5) defines “Gender inequality as discrimination based on sex or gender that results in one sex or gender being consistently privileged or prioritised over another”. This discrimination is prevalent in all spheres of society. Looking at the education sector, it is estimated that women account for more than two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterates (UN Women, 2019). In the formal employment sector, women continue to earn less than males when considering the characteristics of economic gender disparity. These women are more likely to live in poverty, participate in the formal labour market less frequently and confine their life to home tasks. Women have a lesser representation in elected office, as well as in political and corporate employment. (Jacobsen, 2013). Discriminatory social institutions limit women's access to opportunities, resources, and influence in the social realm. These social institutions have deeply ingrained stereotypes in the society that limit women to caregiving and men to breadwinning and consider unpaid domestic and care work a feminine prerogative (Ferrant and Fuiret, 2018). Gender disparities that individuals incur can also be evaluated at the national level, where countries miss out on capturing the productivity of half of the population and lose development opportunities. Leveraging this potential can improve the level of development and the well-being of the individual and society (Jacobsen, 2013). Thus, the focus of this essay is to deconstruct gender inequality and analyse how structured inequality can inform the design of policies that promote and speeds up the process of global development.

For decades, gender inequality has been at the forefront of development policy discussions. This policy concern has been matched by scholarly interest, resulting in a large body of research focused on proving that reducing gender disparities helps development (Bandiera and Natraj, 2013). The United Nations defines development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural, and political process that aims to continuously improve the well-being of the entire population and all individuals through their active, accessible, and meaningful participation in development and the equitable distribution of the benefits that result from it (Kiwanuka, 1988). Every country is devoted to development; for example, today, governments are trying to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. However, development impacts are not universal for all individuals and have significantly affected women differently. This difference is due to the socially constructed gender hierarchy, which has pushed the male patriarchy from the private to the public sphere (Orloff, 1996). Private patriarchy refers to the injustices faced by women in homes and families. With development, this patriarchy has moved into institutions (the public sphere) like education, employment, and government (ibid). Although women are visible in these institutions, they yet encounter inequality in the forms of wage and educational gaps, female poverty, and part-time employment (Heimer, 2000)

The development's goal is to improve everyone's equal well-being, which entails all genders having access to equal opportunities and lifestyles. Development is calculated using the Human development index (HDI) compiled by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which uses three components: Health, Education, and Income. A nation is deemed more developed the closer its score is to one. On the other hand, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) uses three metrics to quantify the gender gap: labour participation, empowerment, and reproductive health (United Nations, 2020). The achievement is better the lower the GII score. Figure 1 compares how the HDI score at the global level is increasing while the GII has maintained a steady value since 2010. The slow progress in GII shows that development policies have been poorly designed and fall short of being gender-transformative ["policies that transform gender relations to achieve gender equality" (Nomoto, 2017, p. 5)].





Year year

Figure 1. a) Human Development Index b) Gender Inequality Index.

*(Source: United Nations, 2022.)*

Thus, this essay concentrates on identifying gaps and comprehending how knowledge of gender disparity can better inform development strategies through the following topics: the theories around development and gender inequality, the gaps in the current development goals, the prevalent form of gender inequality in different regions, what measures should be taken to make policies consider this inequality, and how these programs collectively help in ameliorating gender inequality and advance the goal of global development.

## The relationship between gender inequality and development

Understanding the connection between gender inequality and development is crucial before examining how knowledge of gender disparity may better inform development policies. The existing literature focuses on the relationship between gender equality and economic development, and very few comprehensively discuss human development. At a general level, economic progress and a decrease in gender inequality are thought to have a unidirectional relationship, meaning positive growth leads to the decline in gender inequality but not vice-versa (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997). It is considered that economic development raises the demand for labour, creating more job opportunities that start accommodating women and thus pushing out discriminatory practices (Darity, 1980; Becker, 1985). It has been recorded that the markets that allocate resources through market mechanisms have reduced female exclusion because market systems, regardless of gender, are based on capabilities and production. As a result, an increase in demand for labour will lead to women's access to human capital and help to eliminate gender disparities (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan, 1997).

However, Ferrant (2015) and others challenge this relationship and claim the existence of a bi-directional relationship between gender disparities and economic growth. His research demonstrates that inequality reduces long-term income per capita because it lowers the level and quality of human capital, which in turn lowers productivity. According to the World Bank (2012), equal access to economic opportunities would boost worker productivity by 25%. Therefore, there is a vicious cycle between gender inequality and economic growth: greater inequality impedes economic progress, resulting in more inequality (Ferrant, 2015).

World Bank (2012) examines gender inequality beyond economic development, emphasising that while economic progress reduces gender disparity, income growth alone is insufficient. Gender equality is influenced by how markets and formal/informal institutions have evolved, how growth has manifested itself, and how all these factors have interacted through family decisions. Economic growth is one method of fostering gender equality by easing restraints, expanding market opportunities, and supporting market procedures, among others (Ferrant, 2015). However, as argued above, it alone cannot reduce gender disparity. It is essential to understand the predominant kind of gender inequality and social institutions in the areas and how this information may support economic development initiatives and eliminate inequality while pushing for global development.

There are three indices developed by different organisations at different times to measure gender inequality: The Global Gender Gap Index developed by the World Economic Forum in 2006; GII by UNDP in 2013; and Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI) in 2009 by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Barnat, Macfeely, and Peltola, 2019). The dimensions used in the indexes cover identity, the body's autonomy (absence of abuse toward women, sexuality control, and contraceptive access), intra-family laws, political representation, economic activity, and access to health, education, and economic resources (ibid). Understanding the correlations between these different dimensions is very crucial for effective policy making. For instance, a policy that focuses on increasing girls' schooling (for example, through conditional cash transfers) to increase women's labour force participation is dependent on why girls' education was poor to begin with. Exogenously increasing girls' return to schooling will not boost labour market participation if this condition is driven by social norms that limit women's labour-force participation and, as a result, limit or reduce girls' return to schooling (Bandiera and Natraj, 2013). The intention of this policy to change societal norms through education wouldn’t be effective as the underlying social institution of male preference is not challenged, and this wouldn’t lead to an increase in enrollment as well. The understanding of beliefs, societal norms, and other elements at work in the relationship between gender equality and development is crucial to ensuring that policies are effective in achieving the development objective (ibid). Thus, as put forth by Bandiera and Natraj (2013, p.3), “policies that promote gender equality do not foster development unless causality runs from equality to development rather than vice versa.

## Gender in the global development policies

In the early 1970s, Ester Boserup’s work challenged the notion of women being the passive recipient of development. Since then, various approaches like Women in development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) have been guiding the gender inequalities policies (Kangas et al., 2014). All of these approaches started emphasising the role of women in development and challenging the structural power relations which impact women negatively. It was in 2000 that the states, through the United Millennium Development Goals (MDG), reaffirmed their dedication to reducing gender inequality by 2015. Goal (MDG) three pushed for fostering gender equality and women's empowerment (ibid). However, the OECD reported in 2015 that despite considerable progress, gender equality and women's empowerment were still "unfinished business" in all nations.

Further, as the inequalities persisted, the United Nations published a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 (United Nations, 2015). This time a much stronger and stand-alone goal on gender inequality was included, i.e., SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). It is more holistic than the MDG 3 as it contains targets that challenge the social norms and institutions that discriminate between men and women and accept domestic violence, low pay, and unequal opportunities for women (OECD, 2016). This goal is a big step forward since it displays the recognition of the root causes of poverty as well as other systemic issues such as gender inequality, racism, and economic inequity. (Stuart and Woodroffe 2016). Also, it promotes a legal framework that guarantees equal rights to land ownership/control, and this is the right step in the direction of women’s empowerment and global development. As noted by World Watch Institute in 2019, the ownership by women would increase production by 20-30% and reduce world hunger by 12-17% (Kaul, 2014). Moreover, Gender and women's rights are not only addressed in a stand-alone goal (Goal 5) but they are also mentioned in several other objectives, most notably Goals 4 (Quality education) and 8 (Clean water and sanitation) (Abelenda, 2014). Overall, the new framework (SDGs) is an improvement over the MDGs as, across different targets, it recognises the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the process of sustainable development (Pandey and Kumar, 2019).

However, even after multiple frameworks and development policies, it would take 40 years for women to be equally represented in all spheres (UN, 2015); the International Labour Organisation reports (2017) that the current gender employment gap is 25%, i.e., the women participation rate is 47% while men’s is 72%. These disparities, along with violence against women, have further aggravated due to the pandemic. This presents the gap in the current development policies, which are not truly capable of eliminating gender inequality from its roots by 2030.

The SDGs, in particular, failed to address the following: they did not pursue a truly revolutionary approach to economic and social institutions. It continues to support old economic models and favors growth above other alternative models. That is to say, Industrialization and growth of Gross domestic product are given prime importance. Economic growth is conflated with social progress across the SDGs, i.e. it is considered that economic growth will empower all. However, feminist researchers argue that economic progress does not alter the country's power dynamics. It is dependent on the sector from which the growth is derived, whether the industry provides equal opportunities and outcomes for all genders, and, most crucially, how deeply embedded the patriarchal structure is in the country that curtails equal opportunities (Kabeer, 2016).

Further, the stand-alone goal 5 on gender inequality offers empty rhetoric: particularly, target 5:5 mentions equal opportunities in leadership and decision-making. It doesn’t take note of the fact that mere representation (sharing the table) in all spheres of economic, political, and public will not lead to true gender equality and empowerment (Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights, 2017). This target would lead to, in other words, “empowerment without power”(Esquivel, 2016, p.14). Equality won’t be achieved until women have a say at those tables. Interlinked with this representation approach, the SDG doesn’t challenge the over-representation of women in the informal workforce, which is exploitative, and the cooperative world, which often keeps women in lower positions than men (Banerjee, 2014). Again, in target 5.4, unpaid domestic work is not given recognition explicitly, but it talks about reducing it through social infrastructure and redistributive policies.

While interestingly, domestic work is considered an impediment to women’s labour force participation (Esquivel, 2016). Despite SDGs signalling progress, global development frameworks remain inadequate to address fundamental structural barriers to fully realising women's and girls' rights (Bidegain Ponte and Enríquez, 2016). The gaps in the development policies set the bases for further understanding of how these gaps can be filled, resulting in gender equality.

## Understanding key social institutions and mainstream gender in policies

### (i) Understanding social institutions

Understanding social institutions of different countries that impede women's empowerment is critical to establishing policies that not only lead to economic progress but also remove gender inequality. These institutions are viewed as long-lasting norms, values, and rules of conduct manifested in tradition, cultural practice, and informal and formal laws (Caballero, 2012). They shape women's and men's actions and positions in society, resulting in inequalities in opportunities and outcomes between genders (ibid). Different regions display varying levels and diverse forms of gender inequality because they are at distinct stages of development and governed by different social and cultural institutions. Many studies (Fontanella, Sarra, and Di Zio, 2019; Ferrant and Nowacka, 2015; Luci et al., 2012; and Branisa et al., 2009) have attempted to investigate the relationship between these social institutions and gender inequality and confirmed the role of social institutions play in increasing the inequality. Thus, a critical first step in accelerating the impact of gender-related policies and programs is to understand better how inequality manifests itself around the world, particularly by pinpointing where it occurs using approaches and indicators (Fisher and Naidoo, 2016).

This section will use the research and data published on gender disparity to indicate how the findings can guide the designing of global development policies. Following existing literature and research can be used as a starting point for developing international development policies that are informed by gender disparity.

A study by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen can be used as guidance in understanding how gender inequality is informed by more than one aspect: economic, race, class, and social institutions. In his essay “Many faces of gender inequality, " he put forth seven types of gender inequality. The essay mentions mortality and natality inequality: In some parts of the world, gender inequality affects life and death, manifesting in the form of a strong preference for a boy over a girl. Given the availability of advanced procedures for determining the gender of the fetus, sex-selective abortion has become popular in many countries (Sen, 2001). Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Hong Kong, India, Montenegro, South Korea, Taiwan, Tunisia, and Vietnam are among the twelve countries having substantial statistical evidence of a skewed sex ratio (Ritchie and Roser, 2019).

Even though Sustainable Development Goal 5. Goal 1 states, "End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere" (United Nations, 2021). The existence of sex-selective abortions in countries necessitates the inclusion of stricter norms in the development goals, as well as nudging countries toward research to understand the reasons for it and to frame policies in accordance with it. For example, in India, females are considered a burden due to the dowry system, and as a result, the practice of dowry has been outlawed (however, to date, people disobey the law) (Nayak, 2012).

Apart from focusing on the inequality in under-developing and developing countries, global development also needs to be informed by the types of inequality in developed countries. Amartya Sen puts forth the special opportunity disparity, which means men have easier access to higher education and senior-level job opportunities than women. This type of inequality is prevalent even in countries like North America and Europe (Sen, 2001). This is rooted in the belief that men and women share different responsibilities and activities, which has led to very few women representation in science and related fields. Similar deep-seated biases have led to very few women in leadership positions.

Along with demographic characteristics highlighting anti-female bias, sometimes even governments discourage women from having access to basic facilities. For instance, Afghanistan is one such country in the world where the government deliberately discourages girls from attending school (Sen, 2001). Along with this, there are many countries (Latin America, Asia, and Africa) where women have far less opportunity for schooling (ibid). Again, these governments are formed out of the same social institution that gives preference to men over women. This suggests that, in conjunction with the development goals, effective methods be established to assess and improve commitment to the implementation of international gender equality principles (Mena-Oecd, 2014).

However, when reading this, keep in mind that the goal is never to state that countries experience one kind of gender disparity or another. In fact, it faces a variety of gender disparities, and over time, the same country can shift from one type of gender inequality to harbouring other forms of inequity (Sen, 2001), but it is critical to identify the most critical one and create strategies to address it while also striving to eliminate the other aspects. In order to understand this complexity of gender inequality and its intersectionality, countries and international bodies can use the Social Institution and Gender Inequality Index (SIGI), which covers four dimensions: discrimination in the family; restricted physical integrity; access to financial resources; and Civil liberties (Advanced Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms, 2019). It not only takes into account the differences in private life (families) but also the public sphere allowing countries to have a complete picture of the gender power relations that impedes women’s empowerment. Also, it is required to research how aspects like age, race, ethnicity and others intersect with already existing gender equality to truly accomplish the vision of SDG of ‘leaving no one behind’. Thus, a holistic understanding of the different social institutions at the world level could better guide the development policies.

### (ii) Gender perspective policies

Along with the research on the social institutions of the country, it is also important to have gender perspectives while framing the policies. Gender mainstreaming in development policies has been endorsed by multiple international organisations like UN Women, United Nations, OECD and so on for achieving gender equality along with economic development. It entails incorporating a gender equality perspective at all levels of development policy and program design, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation so that they benefit both men and women and do not exacerbate inequality but rather enhance gender equality (Steans and Tepe, 2016). Women and men's situations vary according to country, geography, age, racial or social origin, or other considerations. Along with taking into account the gender differences while designing policy, it is also very crucial to assess the consequences of policies on gender. Feminist researchers have traced the gendered repercussions of policies in a wide range of fields, revealing that even policies that appear to be gender-neutral, such as agriculture, trade, and energy, have gendered consequences(Allwood, 2013). For instance: women in several nations have been affected by globalisation policies. Globalisation resulted in mass manufacturing, causing businesses to race to the bottom in terms of labour and production costs. In many nations (particularly in emerging and underdeveloped countries), women occupied these positions, exacerbating the wage and working-condition disparities (Parida, 2011). Such past experiences push us to prioritise gender mainstreaming in policies.

Though the United Nations and other organisations commit themselves to mainstream gender in development policies, there is a long way to go to integrate effective gender-sensitive policies across SDGs. The gap lies in not having gender-segregated data across different sectors, which prohibits effective gender mainstreaming. In general, the SDG speaks of empowering all women and girls but is hugely silent on who these women and girls are. There is no doubt that some women and girls are in far worse condition than others. This is not a novel concept in development theory, but we have had difficulty translating theory into practice (Kharas et al., 2020). For many of the SDG targets and indicators, information has not yet been disaggregated by gender, there are no plans to disaggregate by gender, or there are data gaps that prevent us from measuring key issues, hampering our ability to understand today's gender differences and the direction of change (ibid).

For instance, poverty across the world puts our focus on the importance of gender mainstreaming. Poverty and development are two sides of the same coin (Oyeshola, 2007). To bring development, it is very much required by countries and at international levels to look at poverty through a gender lens. Different concepts and theories float in the poverty and gender literature; however, the concept of “feminisation of poverty” is used largely. Different scholars use different definitions for the concept. The most referred to is chant’s (2007) work which defines it as women in general, and women-headed households are poorer than men. However, this concept ignores the dynamics that are played inside the households; it rests on the assumption that resources are shared equally within a household. It links poverty to women rather than gender relations. Thus, there is a need to study poverty within households and “engendering” poverty alleviation programmes (Gornick and Boeri, 2017). For this, it is critical to do empirical assessments of gender and poverty across nations (as the nature of poverty differs across counties) and develop metrics that calculate the poverty within households, social exclusion and constrained capabilities. Using this, scholars should carry out policy analysis that identifies the ways and extent to which poverty-relief policies and strategies accommodate for and respond to gender differences in the drivers, natures, and ramifications of poverty (ibid). Also, available research from organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as well as the work of scholars such as Esther Dermott, Slyvia Chant, and others at the global level (who focus on gender inequality and poverty), can be used by governments and international institutions to broaden understanding of how gender, poverty, and development intersect and incorporate it while framing the policies.

## Conclusion

The global development initiatives still rest on the consideration that economic development is the panacea for gender inequality. However, the persistence of inequality calls this notion into question. SDGs have attempted to incorporate more robust and holistic gender equality targets, particularly through SDG Goal 5, although progress in decreasing inequities has been slow. What is necessary at the design level is an understanding of the cross-national social institutions that obstruct women's empowerment and the development of policies that challenge these social institutions. In addition, there is an urgent need to mainstream gender in all policies, which means considering gender disparities when creating and executing policies. This can be achieved by developing gender-sensitive data- which segregates data according to gender. Within this, the development of micro-level research is more useful for providing specific policy suggestions for development (Bandiera and Natraj, 2013). Though conducting micro-level studies can be difficult because it involves studying social institutions and culture, which is often subjective, and the conclusions derived from it would only suit the specific circumstances, they are an effective way of developing an in-depth understanding of the mechanism at work and framing policies in accordance with it. They can target the real issue at hand, end diverse forms of gender inequality, and bring development for all.

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