



## Women and child development: are sustainable development goals 2030 achievable? A study of BRICS Countries

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### Abstract

The study is aimed at defining, measuring, analysing and recommending policies pertaining to women and child development in BRICS countries. The developmental initiatives and achievements have been linked with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030). The four relevant goals pertaining to women and children have been earmarked for further analysis and detailed cross-country comparative data analysis has been performed. Key measurement indicators have been benchmarked as focus areas. The outcome was inspiring due to the sustainable and increasing trend of the development indicators. The historical policy initiatives of the BRICS countries have been evaluated and landmark policies have been identified with its impact on the socio-economic development. The impact and necessity of public policy preparation and intervention in the light of targeted goal orientation has been elaborated in the paper. In the conclusion, we have highlighted the positive impact of Neoclassical Realist policymaking to ensure implementable and feasible policies to meet developmental needs of SDG 2030.

**Keywords:** women development, child development, sustainable development goals, analysis of BRICS countries, policy interventions, public policy

### 1. Introduction

Global population of women and children are 49.55% and 26% respectively. Therefore, quality education, sufficient calorie intake, hygienic healthcare assistance and other relevant policy measures with social bias can help developing this considerable population which may in turn fast-track economic development of the country. Earlier human security meant only territorial security, but the contemporary meaning has evolved and according to Juan Somavia "it is high time that we acknowledge the primary importance of human security, define it as our new organising principle for international relations and operationalize that change". Empowering women and closing gender gaps are the key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030. Globally, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men. In 2018, of the 189 economies have been assessed, 104 of them have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs. It has been estimated that women's unpaid work constitutes between 10 percent and 39 percent of GDP, 40 percent wage-employed women do not have access to social protection, women and girls are the ones who collect 80 percent of fresh water, but they do not have access to the same. As described by notable economist Lawrence Summers "investment in the education of girls may well be the highest return investment available in the developing world."

Children are one of the most vulnerable sections of the society in today's world. Due to malnourishment and ill-health of the mother during pregnancy, the result of poverty, the infant mortality rate, stunted and wasted growth and malnourishment of the children in the growing age is high. According to 2018 Global Nutrition Report, 150.8 million children under 5 years of age are stunted, 50.5 million under 5 years of age are wasted, and 20 million new-born babies

are born with low birth weight while 38.3 million children under 5 years of age are overweight. This disparity reflects gross inequality and highlights the urgency to be more careful in implementing proper policy measures to ensure achievement of targeted goals.

### 2. Previous Research

The study on women and child development began long back where priorities were to secure the basic rights and protection to the vulnerable section. D.C.Desai, Neera and Patel Vibuti, in 1986, had elaborated on the challenges of women in that decade and discussed the roadmap for continuous improvement. Dev Ram Lal Bindiya (1982) <sup>[2]</sup> in his Monitoring and evaluation of community participation in ICDS elaborated a much-discussed flagship government scheme from India's perspective and termed it as a trail blazer among the then third world countries.

Bruschini, Maria C. A., in 2007, discussed and highlighted the importance of Gender equality in Brazil's perspective. The paper also stated the policy intervention contemplated and implemented to change the status. In 2012, while describing reasons of poverty and chances to alleviate, Lopes Ribeiro, Lilian, and Emerson Marinho pointed out the need of gender equality. They suitably assessed the indicators and concluded that development of the vulnerable section namely women and children is a must for all-inclusive development.

Aref'ev, A., in a paper in 2005, elaborated the historic development regarding child right in Russia. It depicted the need of securing child right from country point of view with a long-term bias. The gradual shift in public policy pertaining to child development was an eye-opener for policy makers. In a 2002 paper, Dymchenko, L.D. and L.C. Callister mentioned the need of maternal and child healthcare in line with social developmental agenda. Their

thinking got reflected almost in similar terms in SDG 2030 targets.

Gassmann, F. and G. Notten, in 2008, analyzed correlation of universal childcare benefits and economic development in the context of Russia. In 2002, Kay, R. described the changing dynamics of women employment and empowerment in Russia that subsequently helped it to improve its key human development and equality indicators. Similar viewpoint was contemplated by McNown, R., & Rajbhandary, S. in 2003 regarding labor market participation of adult women where they spoke about improving trend in developing countries like China.

Usha, K.B. had focused in 2005 on the area of political empowerment of women in the context of Russia where cross-country analysis was also performed. Zavyalova, E.K. and S.V. Kosheleva had evidenced in 2010 the impact of gender equality in overall human development of Russia. They analyzed the need and effect of policy interventions in

this regard with empirically proved outcome.

**3. Initial theoretical framework and methodology**

As stated earlier, the study is having an objective to establish- to assess the prevailing condition of women and child development in BRICS countries with an aim to ascertain the trend that may indicate the possibility to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030. The research revolved around the objectivity and achievability of the SDG goals pertaining to women and child development. In our discussion, Goal 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the seventeen goals are considered and analyzed.

**3.1 Relevant indicators of sustainable development goals**

As the SDG 2030 contains 17 qualitative and quantitative goals, the ones which are of relevance in our research are pointed out as under (Figure: 1):

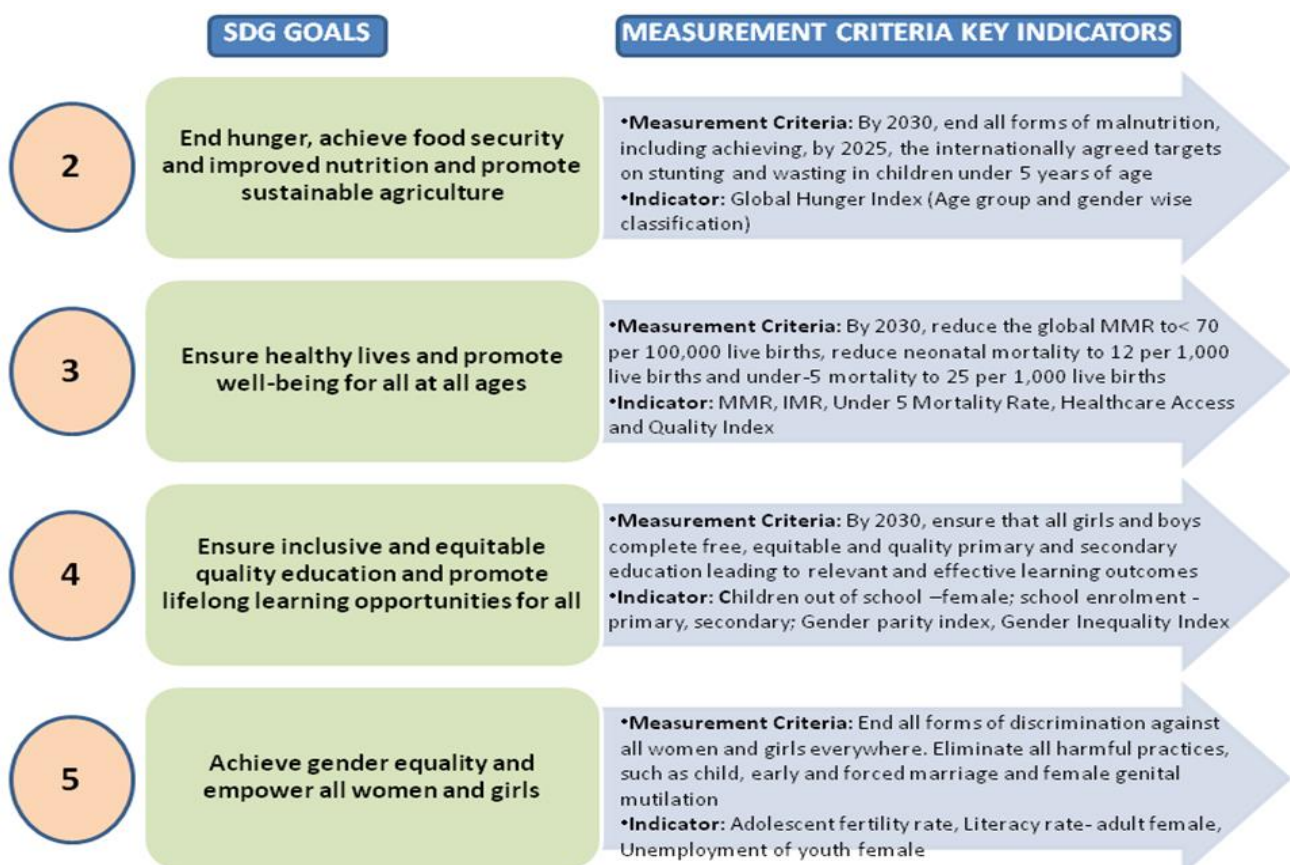


Fig 1

We started with understanding the SDG 2030 by not only going through the goals and the defined parameters to measure those but also quantifying the measurable indicators. As it has been pointed out in Figure: 1, we have detailed the progress of some of those to analyze the policy initiatives of the governments towards achieving SDG targets. The analysis has been performed for BRICS countries to have a broad overview of the developing nations.

The research methodology includes obtaining relevant data from World Bank database and analyzing the trend of the selected parameters. As we are focusing on women and child development parameters, we have identified measurement criteria covering the research area namely modeled ILO estimate of female unemployment (% of

female labor force), under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births). Human Development Report data showed us the relevant level of developmental indicators during 2016-17. Subsequently the stated parameters were analyzed based on World Bank data. This resulted in determining the trend of women and child development from the perspective of BRICS countries.

**4. Presentation of data and explanation**

While starting with gender equality, the parameters of Gender Inequality Index were assessed (Table: 1). It reflected that the rank varied widely from 36 to 127 and the index value from 0.152 (very high) to 0.524 (Medium-Low range). The parameters which are responsible to calculate

the index were

**Table 1**

Gender Inequality Index		
Country	Value	Rank
	2017	2017
Russian Federation	0.257	53
Brazil	0.407	94
China	0.152	36
South Africa	0.389	90
India	0.524	127

**Table 2**

Human development groups	Value
Very high human development	0.170
High human development	0.289
Medium human development	0.489
Low human development	0.586

further analyzed. These are Maternal mortality ratio (MMR)(SDG 3.1), Adolescent birth rate (SDG 3.7), Population with at least some secondary education (SDG

4.6), Share of seats in parliament (SDG 5.5), Labour force participation rate. The prevailing data of 2017 for these countries express a mixed outcome where Russia and China did well in MMR but South Africa and India had scope of improvement. China performed considerably better in Adolescent birth rate whereas Brazil had a long way to go. India did not perform well in Labour force participation rate of women but China, Brazil and Russia fared well (Table: 3).

**Table 3**

Country	SDG3.1	SDG3.7	SDG5.5
	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent birth rate	Share of seats in parliament
	(deaths per 100,000 live births)	(births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	(% held by women)
	2015	Avg 2015-2020	2017
Russian Federation	25	21.6	16.1
Brazil	44	61.6	11.3
China	27	6.4	24.2
South Africa	138	42.8	41.0
India	174	23.1	11.6

**Table 4**

Country	Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older)		Labour force participation rate (% ages 15 and older)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	2010–2017	2010–2017	2017	2017
Russian Federation	95.8	95.3	56.6	71.8
Brazil	61.0	57.7	53.2	74.7
China	74.0	82.0	61.5	76.1
South Africa	74.2	77.4	47.9	62.0
India	39.0	63.5	27.2	78.8

In this connection, the trend of these indicators was also analyzed to obtain a roadmap for these countries. The MMR trend expresses concern for South Africa to reach SDG target of below 70 level due to its increasing orientation whereas the situation is under control for Brazil, China and Russia (Table: 5). India, with a constant improving trend, expects to reach the target by 2030.

destabilizing trend of worsening unemployment level. Another research area child development trend was subsequently analyzed through the data for Under 5 mortality rate and infant mortality rate. It has been observed that for Under-5 mortality rate (Table: 7), countries like Brazil and China have performed exceedingly well by

**Table 5**

Country Name	MMR (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)					
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Brazil	104	84	66	67	65	44
China	97	72	58	48	35	27
India	556	471	374	280	215	174
Russian Federation	63	82	57	42	29	25
South Africa	108	62	85	112	154	138

**Table 6**

Country Name	Unemployment, female (% of female labor force)						
	1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Brazil	7.9	8.1	12.8	12.5	10.4	10.1	14.4
China	2.1	2.6	2.9	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.8
India	2.2	2.6	2.4	4.2	3.3	3.9	3.6
Russian Federation	5.1	9.2	10.4	6.9	6.8	5.3	4.6
South Africa	33.7	35.4	35.9	36.4	27.0	27.5	29.3

Though not target-specific, the female unemployment rate (Table: 6) requires due attention for South Africa and Brazil reflecting the need of women empowerment and the existing

**Table 7**

Country Name	Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)							
	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2017
Brazil	96.5	77.1	63.1	47.9	34.7	24.9	18.7	14.8
China	62.3	53.9	53.8	47.4	36.8	24	15.8	9.3
India	167.5	145.4	126	109.4	91.7	74.5	58.4	39.4
Russian Federation	27.6	24.9	21.7	22	19.4	13.8	10.4	7.6
South Africa	93.8	73.5	60.9	63.2	78.4	84	59.3	37.1

**Table 8**

Country Name	Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)							
	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2017
Brazil	76.7	62.9	52.6	41	30.4	22.1	16.7	13.2
China	47.9	42.2	42.1	37.7	30.1	20.3	13.6	8
India	114.3	100.7	88.5	77.9	66.7	55.7	45.3	32
Russian Federation	23.2	21.1	18.5	18.7	16.6	11.9	8.9	6.5
South Africa	68	55.1	46.9	47.1	52.1	52	38.4	28.8

Continuously reducing it to a level of comfort to meet SDG 2030 target of 25 per 1000 live births. The data for India is encouraging due to its near 77% improvement since 1980. The target of preventable infant mortality rate seems to be viable for countries like China, Brazil and Russia (Table: 8).

India, with a Compound annual reduction rate of 3.5% since 1980, is expected to reach sub 20 level if operated with the same degree of intent. Hence policy intervention is expected to improve infant and neo-natal care. This study on the said parameters not only stated the health of policy measures for women and child development in these countries but also indicated the required intervention to achieve SDG 2030 targets.

#### 4.1. Major Policy initiatives by BRICS countries

To start with, Brazil played a decisive role in child development and the result for both under 5 mortality rate and infant mortality rate reflect it. Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), starting from 1992, was a landmark policy measure. It is an intervention strategy which promoted exclusive breastfeeding from the initial hours of birth. It also publicized the positive impact of breastfeeding. This policy initiative has now been converted into an all-encompassing broader version where the prenatal care of the mother and neonatal care of the baby in newborn units have been consolidated.

Although there was a problem in disbursing various social assistance during 1990 crisis in Russia, the country always fared well to fulfil the need of the women and children in broader national cause. Disabled children were not legally recognized in Russia till 1979 due to their inability to perform professional activities. The law was subsequently changed in line with UN guidelines. International Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was ratified on August 16, 1990. Adopted in 1993, the Russian Constitution provides state protection and due care of childhood, motherhood, and family welfare. Family Code of the Russian Federation, Federal Law on Basic Guarantees of the Rights of the Child in the Russian Federation, Fundamentals of Health Care Legislation, Federal Law on State Assistance to Individuals having Minor Children, Federal Law on State Support of Youth and Children's Organizations, Federal Law on Social Assistance were subsequently adopted resulting in a sea change in the developmental aspects. Federal Law on State Subsidies to Individuals with Children provides monetary assistance during pregnancy and for childbirth; one-time assistance to women registered with hospitals during the early months of pregnancy; monthly assistance during eighteen-month maternity leave period post child birth and monthly assistance for each child up to age sixteen or completion of graduation but no later than eighteen years. Families with an income below 1.5 times the 'minimum subsistence level', a key quantitative poverty indicator, are to receive around 10000 rubles (US\$180) per month until their first child is 18 months old. The initiatives are visible in the sustenance of the improved level of indicators of the country. The decreasing trend in female members in Duma- from 35% in 1991 to 6% in 2012- has definite matter of concern. Labour market discrimination and gender inequality in the country are to be addressed with further policy measures.

National Integrated Plan for Early Child Development in South Africa 2005-2010 promoted early child development, birth to 4 years, by fulfilling area specific needs of neonatal care, nutrition, medication, vaccination and early education. The objective was to address the needs of children as a whole with special emphasis on minorities and vulnerable sections with detailed penetration for states, municipalities and districts. This plan was revised with the incorporation of

inputs from Department of Basic Education in 2013 i.e. to prioritize universal access to Grade R for 5 to 6 year old children by 2014. These developmental programs in South Africa are implemented by various stakeholders namely Government, NGOs, Private players, Corporate organizations.

India, being far behind compared to other BRICS members in most of the said indicators, had a herculean task to perform to meet targeted goals. Government of India, through landmark policy measures, had not only improved the scenario on sustainable basis but also expedited the achievements in most of the areas to set examples for other countries. Priyadarshini (2011), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (The National Credit Fund for Women) (1993), The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls – Sabla (2012), Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) and Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB) for pregnant and lactating women (2010), Mother and Child Tracking System (2009) for monitoring the health care system to ensure that all mothers and children have access to a various services- were the range of government initiatives in India to improve the state of women and children. The present flagship programs which are instrumental in transforming the developmental agenda are Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, UJJAWALA -a comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, SWADHAR Greh -a scheme for women in difficult circumstances, One Stop Centre Scheme etc. The result for all the earlier initiatives and recent policy measures are visible in the changed developmental scenario.

China attempted innumerable measures to improve the status of women by protecting their rights by formulating relevant policies with an aim to emancipate gender equality. National People's Congress and its Standing Committee took plenty of policy measures to secure sustainability in the improved status of women. The 'Outline for the Development of Chinese Women' is the national program to perform targeted objectives of Beijing (1995) and the program performed remarkably well in achieving its targets. Later the Millennium Development Goals were merged with it for a better and efficient visibility. The next modified version of the document highlighted 34 key objectives and 100 policy interventions in various fields: women education, laws related to women empowerment, women and economy, women's participation in administration, women healthcare, and women's role in environment. In 1990, the contribution of state to the healthcare of women and children were approximately 300 million yuan and 1.2 billion yuan respectively whereas it rose to 1.6 billion yuan and 9.1 billion yuan in 2003- a mammoth increase that got reflected in the key indicators. China had either achieved the SDG goals or inching towards meeting the targets within stipulated time frame.

#### 4.2. Source of Data

The above analysis was performed with the data available at World Bank website. The Human Development Report site was referred and statistics were used to perform analysis.

#### 4.3. Scope and limitations of research

Further, there are possibilities to analyze other quantitative goals and its achievements. Due to paucity of authentic data,

analysis related with school dropouts, primary and secondary enrolments, women in decision making position, government assistance trend in women and children healthcare were not performed. This resulted in narrowing down the scope of research, but the sample statistics and its trend outcome cemented the very fact that BRICS countries had performed remarkably well in doing away with the prevailing state of women and children through various public policy interventions.

## 5. Conclusion

The research work covers a considerable range of subjects starting from public policy, developmental needs for the vulnerable classes namely women and children, global benchmarking of targeted goals, trend analysis and detailed review of landmark policy interventions. We derived our initial thinking from the realm of Classical Realism which talks about the human nature of its well-being and goal orientation. The prevailing state of affairs for the women and children in the BRICS countries reiterated the fact of human tendency to neglect the cause. Subsequent state intervention and policy initiative addressed the need of the hour with its Neorealist approach that revolves around state policies and measures for situational improvement. The countries took resort to offensive strategies to eradicate the hindrances and subsequent defensive stance to maintain sustainability. The targets set in the global forum, commonly defined as SDG, are reasonable and the BRICS countries took relevant policy measures to achieve those by exemplifying Neo-Classical Realist approaches combining the human intent and the state initiatives. Public policy, as the name goes, is drafting guidelines for obtaining a utilitarian scope of coverage. Government of BRICS countries invariably fought with the policy obstacles and came out victorious with their egalitarian and fair viewpoint of policy making. The social bias of the policy makers ensured the achievements. But there is a long way to travel to meet the standard of the OECD countries as nations like Brazil and India are late starters. The trend analysis is encouraging and prods us for a better and evenly distributed future with accelerating policy orientation towards the development of the vulnerable section- women and children.

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