

# Status of Women: North Eastern Region of India versus India

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**Abstract-** Geographically, men and women share the same space, but everywhere in the world, women are accorded a lower status than men. The North Eastern Region of India has been considered as a backward region in terms of growth in per capita income. However, there is a perception that the status of women is higher in the North Eastern Region of the country in comparison with the status of women in all India average. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the status of women in the North Eastern Region in comparison with all India average. It is found from the analysis that the status of women in the region is comparatively better than the rest of the country only in some selected indicators. The indicators reveal that women have a very low degree of freedom of movement and low level of control over themselves in North Eastern Region.

**Index Terms-** India, North Eastern Region, Status, Women

## I. INTRODUCTION

‘Status of Women’ refers to the position of women in society in relation to men. Although, geographically, men and women share the same space, yet they are not treated equally in the world. In reality, there exists inequality in women’s access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic, social and cultural field. Everywhere in the world, women are accorded a lower status than men. According to Mohiuddin (1995), women’s lower status is manifested in women’s low wage rates than men in all occupational fields and industries, in their limited upward mobility, and in their greater family responsibilities due to divorce, abandonment, etc. in the developed countries. In the developing countries, women’s lower status is reflected not only in their work being underpaid, unrecognised, but also in their limited access to productive resources and support services such as health and education.

The status of women can be judged by some indicators. To measure the status of women a composite index is constructed by the Population Crisis Committee (PCC) and used by the World Bank and the United Nations which focuses on indicators measuring health, education, employment, marriage and childbearing and social equality. Mohiuddin (1995) argues that these indicators have a poverty-bias and measure women’s status in terms of structural change rather than in terms of their welfare vis-a-vis men. Therefore, he formulated an Alternative Composite Index (ACI) of the status of women, based on many more indicators reflecting women’s issues in both developed and developing countries. The ACI is based on several indicators in eight sectors: health, schooling, adult education, labour force

participation, conditions of employment, domestic life, political representation and legal rights. Rustogi (2004) tried to measure women’s status with the help of a diverse set of indicators. She selected some broad indicators across Indian states namely education, health, survival, participation in private/public decision making and safety/security to measure the status of women in the society.

The region located on the north east part of India are regarded as the North Eastern Region (NER) and it consists of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. The NER of India has been considered as a backward region in terms of growth in per capita income. In 2007-08, the per capita income of the state at constant (2004-05) prices was Rs.20, 279 against the per capita income for the country of Rs. 33, 731 (Government of Assam, 2010-11). Generally, it is thought that the status of women is comparatively better in tribal society (Handsdak, 2012; Burman, 2012). The tribal people are more in numbers in the NER. The scheduled tribe are 94.75 per cent in Mizoram, 87.70 per cent in Nagaland, 85.53 per cent in Meghalaya, 63.66 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, 34.41 per cent in Manipur, 30.95 per cent in Tripura, and 12.82 per cent in Assam (Zahol, 2010). Moreover, there is matrilineal system (The matrilineal societies are those societies where property is transmitted from mother to daughter) in Meghalaya. Therefore, there is a perception that the status of women is better in the states of the North Eastern Region of the country in comparison with the status of women in rest of India. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the Status of Women in North Eastern Region in comparison with the all India average. This paper is organised in four parts. The introductory part introduces the study problem and presents the objectives of the study. The second part describes the data source and methodology of the study. While results and discussion are presented in the third part, conclusion is presented in the final part.

## II. DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data. The data are mainly collected from the Census reports of the government, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Registrar General of India etc.

The status of women in North Eastern Region in comparison with the rest of India is examined on the basis of different indicators, namely Female Literacy (FL), Female Workforce Participation Rate (FWPR), Gross Enrolment Ratio, Dropout Rates, Sex Ratio, Female Infant Mortality, Age at Marriage, and Women’s Participation in Decision-

making/Women Empowerment. Mostly, status is examined with the help of the method of ranking of states in different indicators. Rankings are assigned from the best to worst performing states. However, in case of the negative indicators like dropout rates, infant mortality etc. (where high values are unfavourable for the society), rankings are given from worst to best performing states.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The status of women in NER is examined on the basis of the following indicators.

#### 3.1 Female Literacy and Gender Gap

The female literacy and the gender gap of NER along with the other states of the country are presented in Table 1. Ranking of the states in the table depicts the picture that the states with high women literacy rates are the states of NER (except Arunachal Pradesh), and Kerala. These are also the states where the gap in literacy rates between men and women is low. Both non-economic and economic factors are discussed in the literature to explain the prevalence of the gender gap in literacy rates.

**Table 1. Female Literacy and Gender Gap in Literacy Rates (GLR)**

State	Rank in Female Literacy	Rank in GLR	State	Rank in Female Literacy	Rank in GLR
Kerala	1	2	Assam	13	9
Mizoram	2	3	India	14	15
Lakshadweep	3	5	Orissa	15	17
Tripura	4	7	Chhattisgarh	16	22
A & N Islands	5	6	Madhya Pradesh	17	20
Goa	6	8	Andhra Pradesh	18	13
Nagaland	7	4	Arunachal Pradesh	19	11
Maharashtra	8	12	Uttar Pradesh	20	18
Meghalaya	9	1	Jammu & Kashmir	21	19
Manipur	10	10	Jharkhand	22	23
Uttarakhand	11	16	Bihar	23	24
Gujarat	12	14			

Source: Census of India (Provisional Data), 2011

#### 3.2 Female Work Participation Rate

The female workforce participation rate of the states of NER in comparison with the rest of India is presented in Table 2. The table reveals the fact that female work participation rates (FWPR) are higher in most of the NER states with hilly regions and those inhabited by tribals than other states of rest of India, even in Kerala. Except Assam, Manipur and Tripura, the FWPR are higher than all India average for many NER states. These are

also the states where there are low gender disparities in terms of work participation. Higher FWPR can be partially explained by the fact that community-based organisation of subsistence production requires a high level of women's labour participation. Some scholars have linked higher participation of women with rice cultivation. Another factor associated with better work participation levels is educational attainment.

**Table 2. Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR)**

States/Uts	Rank	FWPR	States/Uts	Rank	FWPR
Chattisgarh	1	62.7	Madhya Pradesh	13	41.1
Himachal Pradesh	2	58.8	Jharkhand	14	39.8
Nagaland	3	56.5	Jammu and Kashmir	15	38.4
Andhra Pradesh	4	52.7	Gujarat	16	37.9
Meghalaya	5	51.4	Orissa	17	37.8
Rajasthan	6	46.2	Uttarkhand	18	36.6
Mizoram	7	45.4	India		35.6
Arunachal Pradesh	8	45.1	Manipur	19	31.5
Karnataka	9	43	Kerala	20	27.3
Maharashtra	10	42.9	Punjab	21	26.3
Sikkim	11	41.2	Assam	22	20.8

Tamil Nadu	12	41.1	Tripura	23	15.6
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Source: Based on calculations from NSSO (2010).

### 3.3 Gross Enrolment Ratio

The gross enrolment ratio of the states of NER with the other states of India is presented in Table 3. When the enrolment rates of Class I-VIII of Schools for General Education in

different states of India are compared, it is seen that the enrolment rates are comparatively higher in NER than some states of the rest of India like Bihar, Goa, U.P and Chandigarh.

**Table 3. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Class I-VIII of Schools for General Education**

States/UTs	Classes I-VIII (6-13 years)			States/UTs	Classes I-VIII (6-13 years)		
	Girls	Boys	Total		Girls	Boys	Total
Andhra Pradesh	90.11	90.18	90.15	Orissa	104.68	105.62	105.16
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>138.1</b>	<b>146.31</b>	<b>142.26</b>	Punjab	100.6	102.84	101.83
<b>Assam</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>82.21</b>	<b>83.54</b>	Rajasthan	98.71	109.97	104.63
Bihar	86.03	100.79	93.72	<b>Sikkim</b>	<b>123.37</b>	<b>118.82</b>	<b>121.08</b>
Goa	86.13	88.75	87.5	Tamil Nadu	114.07	114.32	114.2
Gujarat	106.04	108.88	107.56	<b>Tripura</b>	<b>121.74</b>	<b>123.56</b>	<b>122.66</b>
Haryana	87.58	84.31	85.79	Uttar Pradesh	96.27	94.65	95.42
Himachal Pradesh	109.38	110.37	109.9	West Bengal	110.74	107.16	108.92
Jammu & Kashmir	104.27	104.67	104.48	A&N Islands	73.04	75.62	74.34
Karnataka	97.66	99.81	98.76	Chandigarh	64.71	62.62	63.55
Kerala	97.11	98.58	97.86	D&N Haveli	101.98	105.24	103.69
Madhya Pradesh	130.18	133.32	131.81	Daman & Diu	83.48	72.35	77.1
Maharashtra	96.4	99.82	98.18	Delhi	116.35	116.31	116.33
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>147.73</b>	<b>155.44</b>	<b>151.64</b>	Lakshadweep	75.68	73.99	74.83
<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>141.86</b>	<b>135.15</b>	<b>138.49</b>	Puducherry	100.39	95.6	97.87
<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>133.58</b>	<b>142.98</b>	<b>138.33</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>101.09</b>	<b>103.75</b>	<b>102.47</b>
<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>83.45</b>	<b>83.2</b>	<b>83.32</b>				

Source: Government of India (2012), *Data for use of Deputy Chairman*, Planning Commission, 10 April.

### 3.4 Dropout Rates

The disgusting point revealed by Rustogi (2004) on the basis of the Government of India (2001) data is that the dropout rates are very high in the states of NER than many states of rest of India. Rustogi (2004) opined that the use of girls in sibling care, as additional hands for helping mothers in the household, farm and off-farm work and so on operate to reduce the availability of formal education for them. Given low retention at the primary level, very few girls reach middle and secondary school or higher levels of education. Lower literacy also impacts

upon women's awareness levels regarding their own health needs, thereby foreclosing the possibility of improving their access to the available services for their well-being.

Here, the dropout rate of the states of the NER is compared with the dropout rates of the other states of the country and accordingly ranking is assigned in Table 4. The table shows that the dropout rates of the states of the North East are higher than the all India average for 2010 data. These findings are in line with the findings of Rustogi (2004) for the 2001 data.

**Table 4.State wise Dropout Rates in Classes I-X (6-16 years) in India**

States & UTs	Total	Girls	Rank	States & UTs	Total	Girls	Rank
<b>Sikkim</b>	<b>80.73</b>	<b>79.36</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>52.76</b>	<b>51.97</b>	
<b>Assam</b>	<b>77.6</b>	<b>77.82</b>	<b>2</b>	Karnataka	46.62	46.33	17
<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>77.89</b>	<b>76.46</b>	<b>3</b>	Jammu & Kashmir	44.3	40.63	18
Bihar	77.56	76.06	4	Punjab	40.42	39.45	19
<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>74.86</b>	<b>73.97</b>	<b>5</b>	Goa	34.3	32.63	20
Rajasthan	71.64	73.42	6	Tamil Nadu	34.06	30.28	21
Madhya Pradesh	65.71	71.32	7	Daman & Diu	35.93	29.75	22
West Bengal	71.83	70.7	8	A&N Islands	30.06	27.07	23
Orissa	68.19	65.91	9	Lakshadweep	25.13	22.67	24
Gujarat	62.14	64.41	10	Haryana	19.84	19.46	25
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>64.86</b>	<b>64.7</b>	<b>11</b>	Himachal Pradesh	20.65	18.93	26
D&N Haveli	58.83	63.48	12	Uttar Pradesh	23.83	15.09	27
<b>Tripura</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>62.34</b>	<b>13</b>	Delhi	1.97	9.15	28
<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>62.87</b>	<b>60.72</b>	<b>14</b>	Chandigarh	3.78	7.86	29
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>56.79</b>	<b>55.71</b>	<b>15</b>	Puducherry	7.34	1.39	30
Andhra Pradesh	53.36	54.02	16	Kerala	-4.06	-5.2	31

Source: Government of India (2012), *Data for use of Deputy Chairman*, Planning Commission, 10 April.

### 3.5 Sex Ratios

A decline in the proportion of women in the populations of many countries in the world has been witnessed over the years. Researchers have linked many factors like son preference to gender bias against girls in healthcare, nutrition, food allocation etc. to explain the declining sex ratio. The Census, 2011

(provisional) data reveals the low proportion of girls in the states of Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and comparatively higher proportion of girls in the states of NER (refer Table 5).

**Table 5.Child Sex Ratio among the States of India**

Serial Nos.	States	2011	Rank	Serial Nos.	States	2011	Rank
1	Andhra Pradesh	992	3	15	Maharashtra	925	18
2	<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Manipur</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>6</b>
3	<b>Assam</b>	<b>954</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>5</b>
4	Bihar	916	21	<b>18</b>	<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>8</b>
5	Chhattisgarh	991	4	<b>19</b>	<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>16</b>
6	Goa	968	10	20	Orissa	978	7
7	Gujarat	918	20	21	Punjab	893	23
8	Haryana	877	26	22	Rajasthan	926	17
9	Himachal Pradesh	974	9	23	Sikkim	889	24
10	Jammu & Kashmir	883	25	24	Tamil Nadu	995	2
11	Jharkhand	947	15	<b>25</b>	<b>Tripura</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>13</b>
12	Karnataka	968	11	26	Uttar Pradesh	908	22
13	Kerala	1084	1	27	Uttarakhand	963	12
14	Madhya Pradesh	930	17	28	West Bengal	947	15

Source: Census of India, 2011 (Provisional data).

### 3.6 Age at Marriage among Females

The age of marriage among female of the states of the country is compared and ranking is done in Table 6. Despite the legally stipulated minimum age of 18 years at marriage, girls still

get married before attaining this age in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh which is not the case with the states of NER.

**Table 6. Mean Age at Marriage among Females (MAMF)**

States	Rank	MAMF	States	Rank	MAMF
Rajasthan	20	16.6	<b>Tripura</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19.3</b>
Madhya Pradesh	19	17.0	<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19.6</b>
Bihar	18	17.2	<b>Assam</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19.7</b>
Andhra Pradesh	17	17.5	Tamil Nadu	8	19.9
Uttar Pradesh	17	17.5	Sikkim	7	20.2
Haryana	16	18.0	<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20.5</b>
<b>India</b>		<b>18.3</b>	Punjab	6	20.5
West Bengal	15	18.4	Kerala	5	20.8
Maharashtra	14	18.8	<b>Manipur</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21.5</b>
Karnataka	13	18.9	<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21.6</b>
Orissa	13	18.9	<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21.8</b>
Gujarat	12	19.2	Goa	1	22.2

Source: Census of India, 2001

### 3.7 Anaemia among Women

Anaemia among women in different states of India is presented in Table 7. The majority of women in India are anaemic. Iron deficiency is particularly pronounced among

women inhabiting in the eastern and almost all of the NER states (except Manipur).

**Table 7. Women Suffering from Anaemia in India**

States	Pregnant women age 15-49 who are anaemic (%)	Ranking	States	Pregnant women age 15-49 who are anaemic (%)	Ranking
<b>Assam</b>	72.0	1	Madhya Pradesh	57.9	14
Haryana	69.7	2	Maharashtra	57.8	15
Jharkhand	68.4	<b>3</b>	<b>Tripura</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>16</b>
Jammu & Kashmir	68.3	4	Tamil Nadu	54.6	17
Orissa	68.1	5	<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>18</b>
Chhattisgarh	63.1	6	<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>19</b>
West Bengal	62.6	7	Uttar Pradesh	51.6	20
<b>Sikkim</b>	62.1	8	Uttaranchal	50.8	21
Rajasthan	61.7	9	Punjab	41.6	22
Gujarat	60.8	10	<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>n.a</b>	
Karnataka	60.4	<b>11</b>	Himachal Pradesh	39.2	23
Bihar	60.2	12	Goa	36.9	24
<b>Meghalaya</b>	60.2	<b>12</b>	<b>Manipur</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>25</b>
Andhra Pradesh	58.2	13	Kerala	33.8	26
<b>India</b>	57.9		Delhi	29.9	27

Source: NFHS-3

### 3.8 The Female Infant Mortality Rate

Generally, male infants are known to be more susceptible to death than females due to biological and genetic reasons. However, in India, the female infant mortality rate surpasses that of males, which reflects socio-cultural influences on mortality (Rustogi, 2004). The female infant mortality rate of the states of

India is presented and ranking is done in Table 8. Although the position of NER regarding IMRF is improving for some states of NER, the IMR of female is still high in Assam and Meghalaya and is significantly higher than all India average.

**Table 8. Infant Mortality Rates (per 1000 live births) among Females (IMRF)**

States	IMRF	Rank	States	IMRF	Rank
Kerala	14	21	Jharkhand	44	11
Goa	15	20	J & K	45	10
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	Gujarat	47	9
Tamil Nadu	24	18	Andhra Pradesh	47	9
<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	Himachal Pradesh	47	9
<b>Tripura</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>49</b>	
Maharashtra	29	16	Haryana	49	8
Delhi	31	15	Bihar	50	7
West Bengal	32	14	Chattisgarh	54	6
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>5</b>
Sikkim	32	14	Rajasthan	57	4
Punjab	35	13	<b>Assam</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>12</b>	Orissa	61	2
Karnataka	39	12	Uttar Pradesh	63	1

Source: Sample Registration System (SRS) ,2012

### 3.9 Women's Participation in Decision-making/Women Empowerment

As reported by Rustogi (2004) in the last eight general elections from 1977 to 1999, 51 to 59 per cent of women have participated as voters. Of the few contestants among women, the winning rate is higher than that of men. Therefore, women's participation in public decision-making is gradually improving. The percentage of currently married women who usually

participate in household decisions is more in the states of the NER than the national average. However, the percentage of women who are allowed to go alone to three places (market, health facility, and outside the community) is less in Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. Similarly, the percentage of women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use is less in Assam, Manipur, Mizaoram and Nagaland than the national average (refer Table 9).

**Table 9. Women's Participation in Decision Making**

States	Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions (%)	Women of age 15-49 who are allowed to go alone to three places (market, health facility, and outside the community)(%)	A bank or savings account that they themselves use (%)	States	Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions (%)	Women of age 15-49 who are allowed to go alone to three places (market, health facility, and outside the community)(%)	A bank or savings account that they themselves use (%)
Andhra Pradesh	40.4	37.3	18	<b>Manipur</b>	<b>69.4</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Meghalaya</b>	<b>77.3</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>16.9</b>
<b>Assam</b>	<b>60.9</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>75.4</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Bihar	32.7	25.2	8.2	<b>Nagaland</b>	<b>73.1</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>7.4</b>
Chhattisgarh	26.8	17.9	8.1	Orissa	41.8	18.7	9.8

Delhi	52	36.6	30.4	Punjab	37.4	39	14.6
Goa	47	56.8	42.4	Rajasthan	22.8	31.6	7.6
Gujarat	36.6	47.3	19.9	<b>Sikkim</b>	<b>58.7</b>	<b>50.9</b>	<b>20.9</b>
Haryana	41.7	40.7	12.4	Tamil Nadu	48.8	54.2	15.9
Himachal Pradesh	39.2	60.4	22.2	Uttar Pradesh	33.7	23.4	13.2
Jammu & Kashmir	25.2	51	21.9	West Bengal	23.9	32.3	14.1
Karnataka	35.2	30.6	22.1	<b>India</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>16.2</b>
Kerala	47.2	34.7	27	<b>Tripura</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>18.7</b>
Madhya Pradesh	29.4	25.7	8.9	Uttaranchal	36	42.8	20.1
Maharashtra	45.4	40.2	20.3	Jharkhand	41.8	36.6	14.4

Sources:NFHS-3, Kishore and Gupta (2009)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the status of women in the states of NER is better in some indicators than the status of women in rest of India. However, puzzling contradictions occur within each state. For example, the sex ratio is high in the states of NER implying more females in the state. However, infant mortality rate for female is high in Assam. Similarly the literacy rate is high but at the same time high dropout rate shows a different picture of the states of NER. In Assam and Nagaland, the female literacy levels are above average and the gap in literacy levels strikingly low; however, enrolment rates for girls are low than the national average. Sometimes the different sources of data may create the problems of compatibility.

Workforce participation is only one of the variables to empower the women in the society. High female employment rate may satisfy 'Practical Gender Needs' (e.g provision of water, healthcare, employment etc.) only not the 'Strategic Gender Needs' (e.g power and control, protection from domestic violence, equal wage, and control over own body etc.). The decision on what to cook, about their own healthcare, and staying with their parents/siblings, the extent of mobility and women's ability to make these choices to go to the market or visit friends/relatives without seeking permission are also important. This study shows that the percentage of currently married women who usually participate in household decisions is more in the states of the NER than the national average. However, the percentage of women who are allowed to go alone to the market, health facility, and outside the community is less in three states, namely Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. Similarly, the percentage of women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use is less in Assam, Manipur, Mizaoram and Nagaland than the national average. These indicators reveal that women have a very low degree of freedom of movement and low level of control over themselves and ability to make change in NER. Economic development does not guarantee gender equality. In informal sector the status of women is more vulnerable. Only gender aware policies of the policy makers and change of the mindset of the people can help in this regard. Although the FWPR has increased in some states of NER, however, in what type of work the women are engaged is a big

question. The other study reflects more casualisation of the female employment in the states in both rural and urban areas which needs serious concern. There is a criticism that only highly qualified people are getting dignified jobs after economic reform in this competitive world and the people of the rural sector are lagging far behind. A rise in the share of regular wage employment could signify an improvement in the quality of female employment only if this rise is faster than the rise in the share of other two categories namely, self-employed and casual worker (Sethuraman, 1998).

Therefore, it requires state specific own individual policy to achieve gender development and gender equality within its borders. A detailed examination of women's status even at the district level is necessary to have the right information for effective planning and implementation of government policy.

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