

Editorial Analysis - 17th June 2024

Two steps back

(The Hindu, 17/06/24)

What is Global Gender Gap Index?

The Global Gender Gap Index, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), is a measurement of how close countries are to achieving gender parity across four key areas:

- **Economic Participation and Opportunity:** This measures things like labor force participation, wage equality, and leadership positions held by women.
- **Educational Attainment:** This looks at literacy rates and enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education for both men and women.
- **Health and Survival:** This considers factors such as life expectancy at birth and healthy life expectancy for both genders.
- **Political Empowerment:** This measures women's representation in government positions.

The global gender gap is slowly closing, with 68.5% closed in 2024. However, the pace of change is very slow, and it will take 134 years to reach full parity.

- Iceland remains number one, having closed over 90% of its gender gap

How is India doing in terms of gender parity?

- Unfortunately, India has slipped two places to 129th out of 146 countries.
- While it closed 64.1% of its gap, there have been setbacks in education and political empowerment.

Following are the areas where India needs to improve

- **Labor force participation:** More women need to be in the workforce, especially considering the low female participation rate (45.9%).
- **Education:** The literacy gap between men and women is significant (17.2 percentage points).
- **Political empowerment:** Women's representation in Parliament remains low, with only 74 women MPs out of 543 (13.6%).

What can be done to improve gender parity in India?

Several measures can be taken:

- Reduce dropout rates for girls in higher education.
- Provide job skills training for women.
- Ensure safety in the workplace for women.
- Promote shared responsibility for housework between spouses.
- Strengthen policies and frameworks that encourage gender equality in business and government.
- The Women's Reservation Bill, which aims to reserve one-third of seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies, has yet to be implemented. This bill could be a significant step forward for women's political participation.

Can you answer the following question?

Critically evaluate India's performance in the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Index. Discuss the key challenges and suggest specific policy measures to accelerate gender parity in India.

Smart Cities Mission

With only 15 days left until the June 30 deadline, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry is thinking about extending the Smart Cities Mission. This extension would give cities more time to finish ongoing projects, which make up about 10% of all the projects.

What is Smart Cities Mission?

- It was launched on 25 June, 2015, with the objective to promote cities that provide **core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment**.
- 100 cities have been selected to be developed as Smart Cities (through a two-stage competition) in various rounds from 2016 to 2018, with each getting five years from their selection to complete the projects.
 - i.e., the original deadlines were from 2021 to 2023.
 - After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the deadline for all 100 cities was fixed to June 2023 in 2021.
 - In May last year, the Ministry again extended the deadline, this time to June 30, 2024.

- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).
 - The Central Government will give financial support to the extent of Rs. 48,000 crores over 5 years i.e., on an average 100 crore per city per year.
 - An equal amount on a matching basis is to be provided by the State/Urban Local Body.

What are the six fundamental principles on which the concept of Smart Cities is based?

Smart Cities are built on six key principles:

- **People-Centric:** Citizens are at the heart of planning and development.
- **Efficiency Focus:** Achieve better outcomes with fewer resources.
- **Collaborative Competition:** Cities work together and compete for excellence.
- **Integrated Innovation:** Sustainable solutions through cross-sector planning and continuous innovation.
- **Tech as a Tool:** Technology is a means to an end, not the ultimate goal.
- **Converged Approach:** Combine resources from public and private sectors for a holistic strategy.

What has been the Performance of Smart Cities Mission?

- Out of the completed projects, 5,588 projects worth Rs 65,996 crore were funded under the Mission.
 - The remaining are from the cities' own resources, PPP mode, convergence with other missions and other sources.
- All 100 cities have set up Integrated Command and Control Centres at a cost of Rs 11,775 crore.
- The different categories which account for the top categories of completed works include:
 - water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects worth Rs 44,300;
 - smart mobility projects worth Rs 33,019 crore; and
 - smart governance projects worth Rs 15,474 crore.
- 400 projects, out of the 7,970, worth Rs 22,814 crore would take beyond December 2024 to complete.
 - The delays were due to the difficulties in resettlement of local population, legal issues such as land procurement, Frequent transfers of smart cities' CEOs and inter-agency coordination issues.