

Fall in female labour force a good sign?

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New Delhi: India's decline in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) is accounted for by a fall in its female labour force participation rate and a worsening of its adolescent fertility rate. Rural development minister Jairam Ramesh, who helped release the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report in New Delhi on Wednesday, claimed that a decline in female labour force participation could indicate improved status for women or better education opportunities.

However, the UNDP report shows that the proportion of women with at least secondary education is still just half that of men. Globally, richer countries with higher human development have higher female labour force participation too. Within India's neighbourhood, Sri Lanka has overtaken China on human development and with an HDI of 0.691, is now within touching distance of the "high human development" category. Sri Lanka performs particularly well on gender equality indicators; its maternal mortality ratio is the same as Russia's.

"Economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for human development. Recent data

shows that high growth states like Gujarat have worse human development measures, particularly on malnutrition, than many of the northern states," Ramesh said. He went on to praise the role of non-government players, including Anna Hazare, in bringing about a change in sanitation.

NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF

Country	HDI rank*	GII rank**	% of multi-dimensionally poor
India	134	129	53.70
China	101	35	12.50
Sri Lanka	97	74	5.3#
Pakistan	145	115	49.4#
Bangladesh	146	112	57.80
Nepal	157	113	64.70
Norway	1	6	NA

*Out of 187 countries; **Out of 146 countries;

Lower bound estimate

Source: UNDP 2011



The 2011 report focuses on sustainability and the impact of environmental degradation on the poor. By 2050, the average HDI could drop by 12% in south Asia due to the effects of global warming on agricultural production, access to clean water and pollution, the report says.

While reiterating his stance that the "real drivers of unsustainability are the developed countries, worst of all the US, which won't even engage with this debate", Ramesh added that just as consumption-heavy lifestyles in the industrialized world affected livelihoods in the developing world, "lifestyles within India also affect the livelihoods of the poor within India".