**Question:**

**Discuss how gender discrimination contributes to underdevelopment. You may elaborate on any of the problems such as imbalance in sex ratio, or girl child’s education, or female labour market participation. Suggest some policy options to alleviate the problem.**

**Answer:**

**(Suggested format)**

**Structure: (Allocation 30% 50% 20%) or (30% 40% 30%)**

Note that there are three parts. A basic premise of the problem is that if a society underinvests or underutilises in its half of the population, it is going to hold back its PPF. Hence, gender discrimination seriously undermines economic development. Of course, there are ethical and moral issues as well. On the fairness ground this is simply unacceptable. But the point is even if one sets aside any normative consideration, there is a clear room for Pareto improvement by eliminating gender discrimination.

**First part:** For the first part you can briefly discuss a range of problems, such as maternal nutrition, girl child’s education, gender discrimination at work place, cultural rules limiting women’s labour market participation etc. Give some economic explanation of the problem. The explanation should apply commonly (at least to majority of them). There may be additional specific economic explanation for a specific problem. You may cite some Gender Development Index (GDI) figures for a global comparison. [Give some data, contextualise your discussion]

**Second part:** For the second part, pick any one and elaborate on it. This part requires your own research on that topic. Contextualise it in reference to the literature and provide empirical evidence to explain whether the problem is regional or global. For example, on the female labour market participation issue, the problem may be global. But for imbalance in the sex ratio the problem is specific to India and China. Offer some economic explanations (based on the literature) about the problem.

**Third part:** For policies you can suggest new ideas, but also discuss some existing ones and discuss the evidence of their effectiveness. For example, special assistance for girl children’s schooling, paying attention to their specific needs, such as safe transport to schools, proper toilets at school, job opportunities for girls. Evidence from PROGRESA intervention, India’s Midday Meal programme, India’s policy of banning sex identification of foetus etc. are some of the examples you can discuss.

**Sample Elaboration of the problem of imbalance in the sex ratio**

In a 1990 article for New York Review of Books Professor Amartya Sen coined one of his most famous phrases -- Missing Women -- that not only inspired a sustained line of research but made public a problem that was shamefully hidden away from academic discourse. His observation was that Asia had 100 million fewer women than Europe and America, and this anomaly could only be explained by purposeful acts of causing premature death to women (Sen 1990). Sen’s observation was crucial, as both India and China, world’s two most populous nations, presented (and thy still present) a highly skewed sex ratio. India has 1.13 boys per girl (under 15) while China has 1.17 boys per girl; the natural rate should be about 1.05 boys per girl.

Following Subsequent to Sen’s 1990 article, academic researchers tried to identify how much of this gender imbalance is ‘man made’ and how much is due to diseases and other factors. Indeed a large body of work pointed out that disease and inadequate health care (in general) could account for a sizeable proportion of the missing women (Oster, 2005; Anderson and Ray, 2010). For example, Oster (2005) argued that mothers infected by Hepatitis B virus were more likely to give birth to a boy child than a girl and this fact alone could account for many missing women. Anderson and Ray (2010) claimed that much of the missing women is attributable to older age groups (due to diseases) than younger aged females.

While the above explanations are compelling, a large proportion of the missing women would still require a completely different explanation, which had to be a combination of female feticide and disproportionately higher neo-natal deaths of baby girls, as Sen (1992, 2003) argued repeatedly and persuasively. Female feticide or killing new-born girls are instances of violence inflicted at an earliest possible age. Given the history of son preference and daughter aversion in Asia, it is not surprising that many parents would take recourse to such inhuman acts. However, a caveat is in order. Careful studies of Indian and Chinese data show that daughter aversion or son preference is not as pervasive as it is made out to be; it is in fact conditional on the first child being a girl (Das Gupta, 2005). In families with multiple children, where the first child is a girl the probability of the second child being a boy is disproportionately higher, so much so that the excess probability cannot be explained except by human manipulation. But if the first child was a boy, the probability of the second child being a boy is no higher than the natural rate.