
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of Women. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities.

Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:-

- * Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision .*
- * Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)*
- * Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making*
- * Having positive thinking on the ability to make change*
- * Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.*
- * Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.*
- * Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated*
- * Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.*

Empowerment of women, also called gender empowerment, has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and economics. Entire nations, businesses, communities, and groups can benefit from the implementation of programs and policies that adopt the notion of women empowerment. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development. The Human Development and Capabilities Approach, The Millennium Development Goals, and other credible approaches/goals point to empowerment and participation as a necessary step if a country is to overcome the obstacles associated with poverty and development.

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MEASURING GENDER EMPOWERMENT

Gender empowerment can be measured through the Gender Empowerment Measure, or the GEM. The GEM shows women's participation in a given nation, both politically and economically. Gem is calculated by tracking "the share of seats in parliament held by women; of female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female profession and technical workers; and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence." It then ranks countries given this information. Other measures that take into account the importance of female participation and equality include: the Gender Parity Index and the Gender-related Development Index (GDI),

Ways to empower women

One way to deploy the empowerment of women is through land rights. Land rights offer a key way to economically empower women, giving them the confidence they need to tackle gender inequalities. Often, women in developing nations are legally restricted from their land on the sole basis of gender. Having a right to their land gives women a sort of bargaining power that they wouldn't normally have, in turn; they gain the ability to assert themselves in various aspects of their life, both in and outside of the home. Another way to provide women empowerment is to allocate responsibilities to them that normally belong to men. When women have economic empowerment, it is a way for others to see them as equal members of society. Through this, they achieve more self-respect and confidence by their contributions to their communities. Simply including women as a part of a community can have sweeping positive effects. In a study conducted by Bina Agarwal, women were given a place in a forest conservation group. Not only did this drive up the efficiency of the group, but the women gained incredible self-esteem while others, including men, viewed them with more respect. Participation, which can be seen and gained in a variety of ways, has been argued to be the most beneficial form of gender empowerment. Political participation, be it the ability to vote and voice opinions, or the ability to run for office with a fair chance of being elected, plays a huge role in the empowerment of peoples. However, participation is not limited to the realm of politics. It can include participation in the household, in schools, and the ability to make choices for oneself. It can be said that these latter participations need to be achieved before one can move onto broader political participation. When women have the agency to do what she wants, a higher equality between men and women

is established. It is argued that Microcredit also offers a way to provide empowerment for women. Governments, organizations, and individuals have caught hold of the lure of microfinance. They hope that lending money and credit allows women to function in business and society, which in turn empowers them to do more in their communities. One of the primary goals in the foundation of microfinance was women empowerment. Loans with low interest rates are given to women in developing communities in hopes that they can start a small business and provide for her family. It should be said, however, that the success and efficiency of microcredit and microloans is controversial and constantly debated.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Most women across the globe rely on the informal work sector for an income. If women were empowered to do more and be more, the possibility for economic growth becomes apparent. Eliminating a significant part of a nation's work force on the sole basis of gender can have detrimental effects on the economy of that nation. In addition, female participation in counsels, groups, and businesses is seen to increase efficiency. For a general idea on how an empowered women can impact a situation monetarily, a study found that of fortune 500 companies, "those with more women board directors had significantly higher financial returns, including 53 percent higher returns on equity, 24 percent higher returns on sales and 67 percent higher returns on invested capital (OECD, 2008)." This study shows the impact women can have on the overall economic benefits of a company. If implemented on a global scale, the inclusion of women in the formal workforce (like a fortune 500 company) can increase the economic output of a nation.

BARRIERS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Many of the barriers to women empowerment and equity lie ingrained into the cultures of certain nations and societies. Many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated inferior to men. Even if men, legislators, NGOs, etc. are aware of the benefits women empowerment and participation can have, many are scared of disrupting the status quo and continue to let societal norms get in the way of development.

Status in India

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

The feminist activism in India picked up momentum during later 1970s. One of the first national level issues that brought the women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station, led to a wide-scale protests in 1979–1980. The protests were widely covered in the national media, and forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists united over issues such as female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy.

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India, many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and other states. Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticized the triple talaq system. In 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements. For example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women came was passed in 2001.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

In the simplest words, empowering the women means creating such an environment in which they can take independent decisions for their personal development and the development of society in general. Empowerment is the process by which the women achieve increased control and participation in decision making which in turn helps to achieve equal basis with men in various spheres – political, economical, social , cultural and civil.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to strive and adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. We have various laws, policies, plans and programmes aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. However, there exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in these various forms of development measures and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analysed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the "Platform for Action, Five Years After – An Assessment".

The problem essentially is routed in gender disparity in India. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. The gender disparity can be understood that it exists by looking at the sex ration in India which stands at 933.

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices. Consequently, the access of women to education, health and productive resources is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded. There are various issues which poses myriads of challenges towards the vision of Women Empowerment. Literacy rate among women is very less. This is the major cause. Despite the concept of Gender Budgeting and various special provisions for women in *Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan*, ie, National Literacy Mission, the ground reality has not changed much. This is one of the foremost reason for women not taking active participation in mainstream economic activities thus making half of Indian Population nearly impotent from economic point of view.

In social field, women are suppressed domestically and do not enjoy respectable position. They are not regarded as intelligent and powerful enough as men. Politically they do not participate and even where they do as voter or representative, mostly they are used as rubber-stamps in the hands of their male relative. They are generally devoted to household work in India's

patriarchal society. Such underprivileged conditions of women led them to face domestic violence, sexual abuse both at home and work place and improper opportunities for progress in every area of life.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. From the studies that were commissioned by the Dept. of Women and Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for reframing of policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to widening of economic disparities leading to feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality, often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas.

We have endorsed The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Session on Gender Inequality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action". But still we lag behind. Where are we wrong this needs to be analysed and as the studies say we need to reframe our policies for the development and empowerment of women.

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