

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IMPREGNATES THE DEVELOPMENT 21ST CENTURY SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

Wherever Women is respected, God resides there. This Vedic verse would come true with the empowerment of women only. It is one of the pivotal features of the development also. According to Todaro, development refers to a multi-dimensional process which recognizes the entire economic and social systems. Therefore development signifies an elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment which can yield higher dividend in future. In this context, the emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical and gender-based discrimination is vital. Women empowerment is an aid to establish economic stability, judicial strength and all other rights which can lessen gender gap considerably. 21st Century is an age of Science and technology, an era of globalization where social transformation accelerates development with a greater pace. In this age of tele-working, tele-shopping and tele-learning, women are considered as mainstream for sustainable development. Today the modern woman is so deft that she can easily make her presence felt in politics, literature, entertainment, technology everywhere. And this empowerment-development nexus is actually self-sustaining to each other.

KEYWORDS

Women empowerment, Missing women, economic development, inequality, education, poverty, healthcare.

1. INTRODUCTION

Once Swami Vivekananda quoted, “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved.” With the ages, this notion prevails in the society. The same thought is seen to be infused in the recent years in Malala Yousafzai also when she quoted, “We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.” Therefore the thinkers all across the generation and continents favour women development and empowerment. Nobel laureate Prof. Amartya Sen coined the term “Missing women” in an article in the “New York Review of Books” (Sen, 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men. Moreover, for each missing woman, there are many more women who fail to get education, a job or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men. So considering the overall scenario of the developing countries, it can be observed that there is a bi-directional relationship between economic development and women empowerment.

Economic development is typically meant for improvement in a variety of areas. The indicators are literacy rates, life expectancy, poverty rates which actually accelerate economic development. Sustainable development is therefore explained as a pattern of social and structural economic

transmissions i.e. development which optimizes the economic and societal benefits available in the present without jeopardizing the likely potentials of future benefits. Therefore, it includes social development and economic opportunity on one hand and the requirements of the environment on the other.

This paper reviews how economic development affects woman empowerment and vice versa. If gender inequality declines, the condition of woman improves. Again when poverty is reduced, lack of opportunity seems to be reduced, then also women's condition will improve. This women empowerment will push economic development in another way.

Objectives of the paper:

1. To study the bi- directional relationship between women empowerment and economic level.
2. To examine the relation between the women empowerment and education.
3. To highlight the relation between the women empowerment and the poverty level.
4. To know the historical as well as sociological dimensions of the issue of women empowerment in India.
5. To study the global perspective as far as women empowerment is concerned.
6. To know the present day problems faced by the Indian women.
7. To highlight the measures for ensuring women empowerment as an accelerating factor of economic development.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on Analytical Method. To analyse and develop a solution to the problem causal chain effect is followed and qualitative research method is used.

2.1 Women Empowerment

The concept of 'empowerment' has its origin back to the civil rights movement in the USA in 1960s. Since then it has been interpreted differently at different times. It ranges between defining it as a process of taking responsibility for own's life and situation on individual ground and at the same time taking it as a political and social process of acquiring human rights in a broader sense. Experts suggest three elements of empowerment which encompass self empowerment, mutual empowerment and social empowerment. Self empowerment means individual effort, mutual empowerment indicates relationship with others and social empowerment is generated out of social, political legal and economic hurdles by establishing individual influence.

Women empowerment is mainly meant for equal distribution of power between the sexes, abolition of gender discrimination for enjoying those opportunities. Actually, women empowerment can be achieved by increasing their rights, resources, capacity to make decision, dignity, choices, opportunities and power (Kabeer, N, 2012).

2.2 Economic development

Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith conceived the idea of economic development as a "multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality

and the eradication of poverty.” (2009 : 16). This definition covers both macro and micro economic development. Prof. Amartya Sen put it as Todaro and Smith, “economic growth cannot sensibly be treated as an end in itself. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedom we enjoy (2009 : 16) The multidimensional goals of development are therefore approached in a revolutionary manner by Prof. Sen with his renowned concepts of functioning and capabilities. His ‘capability approach’ to development argues that what matters the most for people is their capability to function. It reflects tangible as well as intangible things a person values doing. These valued things range from nutrition, health and avoidance of disease to self respect and involvement in the community (Sen, 1999 : 75). And capabilities refer to the freedom that a person has in terms of his choice of functioning’s and command over commodities. Prof. Sen therefore stresses on the freedom to access the basic necessities such as shelter, food, education, health care and thereby achieving economic development at macro level. In making distinction between functioning and capabilities, Prof. Amartya Sen emphasized on the importance of having the freedom to choose one kind of life rather than another. Above all, the ability to exercise freedom may be directly dependent on education we have received. Thus the development of educational sector may have a fundamental connection with the Capability-based Approach. Firstly, more education can accelerate more productivity; secondly, educational advancement can build up a scope for better distribution of aggregate national income among different people; thirdly, being better educated can help in the conversion of incomes and resources into various functioning and ways of living. Lastly, education can play a pivotal role to make an intelligent choice between different types of lives that a person can lead. All these influence the development of valuable capabilities and thus the process of human development.

Another indicator of development is nutrition level .Good health is obviously an achievement in itself. It can contribute to higher productivity as well as can enhance ability to convert incomes and resources into good living.

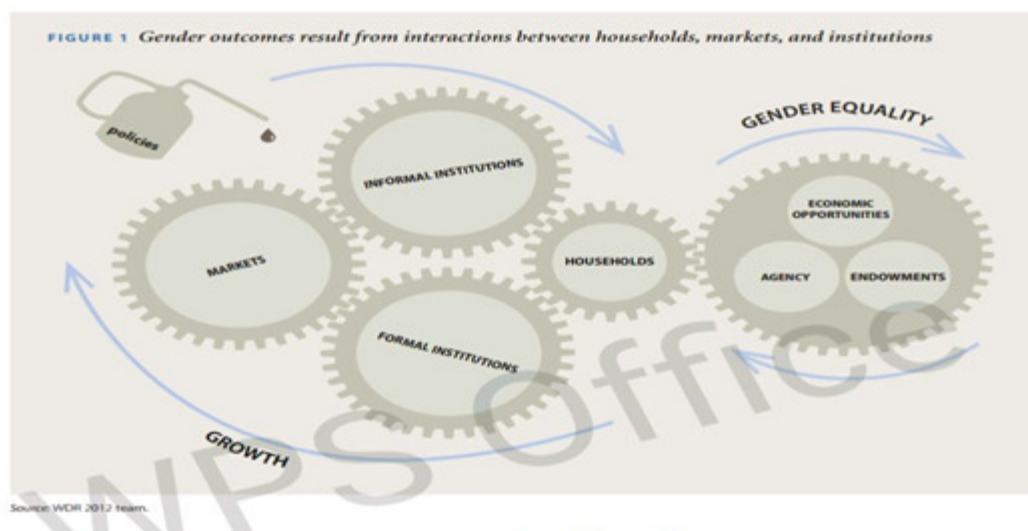
Human capabilities which are the main yardstick of successes and failures of human development are therefore closely interrelated with the above mentioned education, nutrition and health and such other socio-economic instrumentalities. The challenge of “human development in the 1980s’ and beyond” can not be fully grasped without proper enhancement of those freedoms and capabilities which actually matter for economic development.

3. BI-DIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The 2010 Millennium Development Goals(MDG) Summit concluded with the adoption of a global action plan to achieve the eight goals by 2015. The resolution and the action plan reflect the belief of the international development community that gender equality and women's empowerment are development objectives in their own right (MDG 3& 5), as well as critical channels for achieving the other MDGs' and reducing income and non-income poverty. Gender equality and women's empowerment help to promote universal primary education (MDG2), reduce under-five mortality (MDG4), improvement health (MDG5) and reduce the likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS (MDG 6).

Drawing up on past and recent works on gender and development within the World Bank and elsewhere, it can be said that gender outcomes can be understood through the responses of households to the functioning and structure of markets and institutions, both formal and informal.

Household decision making, markets ,formal institutions (such as relating to basic infrastructure, health and education etc.), informal institutions (like social networks, social norms, beliefs etc.) interact together to determine gender -related outcomes .[Fig. 1]



The benefits of economic development on gender outcomes can be seen as emerging from the workings and interactions of households, markets and institutions. Fig. 1 illustrates these impacts by the 'growth' arrow which turns the gears in the direction of greater gender equality. The impact of more gender equality on growth is in turn captured by the 'gender equality' arrow that flows back into higher economic growth. Thus as economic growth accelerates, it in turn push up economic development which results from reducing gender inequality.

The global community stands at a historic crossroads in 2015. Many of the millennium Development goals have been achieved, but progress has been seen unevenly regionalize. Still millions of people are in a disadvantageous position due to discrimination regarding sex, age, education or ethnicity. Women are still facing discrimination in work. Women are also more likely to live in poverty than men. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the ratio are women to men in poor households increased from 108 women for every 100 men in 1997 to 117 women for every 100 men in 2012. Globally, about three quarter of working age men participate in the labour-force, compared to only half of women. Millions of poor people still live in poverty and hunger also without having basic services.

4. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION

21st century world is aware of the fact that women are not the problem, but the solution itself. Human talent is a critical resource and women belong half of it. Effective utilization of available resources, skills, education and productivity can be made possible only if the nation can tap entire available potentials. Researches demonstrate that investment in women education has numerous positive effects like: 1)reduction in female fertility rates; 2)lower infant and child mortality rates; 3) lower maternal mortality rates; 4) increase in women's participation in the production process; 5) fosters educational investment in children; 6) reduction in poverty; 7) improvement in overall health-hygiene practices and better nutrition. All these in turn magnify economic development.

Realizing their actual capabilities within themselves, women thus able to change the way they looked at life and pace the path of economic development. Enhancement of non-formal education for women ,such as vocational or skills training and literacy programmes ,distance mode of education, on-line education system-- all these empower women with greater opportunities to be a part of economic development. Today's technology-driven educational facilities in turn break the constraints of time, space, resources and socio-economic disabilities for the women. These in one hand empower women and in the other hand pave the economic development.

5. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY

Women throughout the developing world engage in economically productive work and earn incomes. They work primarily in agriculture and in the informal sector. Their earnings , however, are generally low. Women living in extreme poverty will not have to struggle to progress along the road of empowerment. Development activities are therefore include the supports to build up the capacity of women and ensure that they have the material support and social networks to be able to enjoy an increased ability to make choices about their own choices. The United Nations, Worlds Summit recommended that “ The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all to resources, to undertake policies geared to more equitable distribution of wealth and income, to provide social protection for those “who cannot support themselves.”

6. HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

In early Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status like men and they were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. Women started being discriminated since the later Vedic period in education and other social rights also. Our history recorded instances of outstanding women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lakshmi Bai etc. But with the passage of time, gradually their social position were deteriorated to the lowest level. Socially they were kept in complete subjection. But during British period, some improvements in the condition and revival of status of women could be seen. Abolition of ‘Sati’ system , spread of Women education, Widow remarriage, abolition of polygamy etc. were done to open more avenues in front of the women. After independence, the Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Duties and directive Principles. In favor of women , at different times different schemes like Indira Mahila Yojana, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Samridhi Yojana etc. were launched. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) was also an important step taken by the then Govt. which aimed at ensuring women empowerment through positive economic and social policies. The policy assured equal access to women to health care, political as well as economical life of the nation. All these measures for empowerment of women strengthened economic development as well.

6.1 Global Perspectives

Benefits of the growing global economy have been evenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities. Increased gender inequality deteriorate working conditions and make the platform for unsafe working environment specially in informal economy and in rural areas. However,

globalization has promoted the ideas of equality for women that in reality acted as a catalyst in their struggle for equitable rights and opportunities in different spheres of their lives.

6.2 Present day Problem Faced By Indian Women

Historically, women have suffered oppression and domination by the patriarchal society in India and have faced many problems. The inferior positions of women in Indian traditional society have been reinforced by a number of traditional practices such as polygamy, early marriage dowry system, illiteracy and by years of subjugation. Many of these practices are still found in some parts of the country. Participation of women in prominent decision-making position is limited by severe cultural and social constraints. Sexual harassment is a serious problem faced by present day Indian working women. Whether in the organized or unorganized sector, whether illiterate, low paid workers or highly educated highly paid executives, a large number of working women face sexual harassment at the work-place at one time or another.

7. MEASURES

Gender equality is a legitimate policy goal itself. Also gender equality and women empowerment are included in Millennium development Goal. It is also desirable from the efficiency perspective in the sense that increases in opportunities for women lead to poverty reduction, spread of education healthcare and thereby accelerate sustainable economic development.

Firstly, investing in the girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Again there are a number of pathways through which maternal education benefits children. It has a positive effect on child's health, hygiene practices and survival. Moreover educated women tend to have fewer children, which reduces dependency rates. In this way, women empowerment will positively correlate with economic development.

Secondly, occupational segregation of women into low-paying occupations may be an important driver of under-investment in girls' education. So the wage gaps and discrimination against women in labour market should be abolished.

Thirdly, if land, capital and other productive inputs are allocated on the basis of non-economic criteria that reflect culturally or legally sanctioned discrimination against women, then allocative insufficiency results. Therefore, social and legal sanctions in favor of women should be initiated through Govt.

Fourthly, greater wage inequality may be associated with lower aggregate savings, which is likely to hamper long-run growth rates. So the gender specific effects on institutional economic factors should be withered away.

Fifthly, public expenditure on literacy and higher education for women should be initiated. Removal of gender stereotypes from curricula mainstreaming enterprise, business skills and different types of technological training for women in general education are need of the hour also.

Sixthly, in India, it is indeed possible to shift power via a change in electoral rules. India's reservation policy, which specifies that, at each election, one third of the villagers are randomly

selected and must elect a woman at the head of the local council-must be implemented effectively from the root level to reap the real benefits in future.

Seventhly, in many developing countries, women are very poorly protected in case of divorce and stand to lose assets and the custody of their children. In this regard, strong legal protection should be initiated to reinforce the women's status.

8. CONCLUSION

In the 21st century scenario, technology -driven advanced society ensures women's progress in all fields. Participation of women in politics, business, social-reforms, entertainment, science and technology everywhere to effectuate change and advancement in a stimulating manner is evident now. Prof. Amartya Sen looked at the “Many faces of gender inequality” and emphasized on the need to “take a plural view of gender inequality” and recommended to put an end to gender inequality. He illustrated ‘Mortality inequality’ which indicates inequality between men-women involving matters of life and death; ‘Natality Inequality’ resulting from ‘high-tech sexism’; ‘Basic facility Inequality’, ‘Special opportunity Inequality’; ‘Professional Inequality’, ‘Ownership Inequality’, and ‘Household Inequality’.

Then the need of the hour is not just freedom of action but also freedom of thought – in women’s ability and willingness to question received values. Therefore neither economic development nor women-empowerment can be the magic bullet alone. The policy measures need to reap the collateral benefits out of women empowerment and economic development bonding extensively.

9. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An extensive review of related literature has thrown ample light on the status of women in general as well as in India, particularly and the gradual changes that have been occurring in the society. The attitude towards women, empowerment of women and economic development, interrelationship between economic development and women empowerment – all these are reviewed with various reference books, articles published in various journals, magazines, newspapers and websites.

Leela P. (2000)⁶ in her book entitled “Women and the changing development scenario” argues that development of women is crucial as far as socio-economic transformation of the nation is concerned. They have to be brought into development as process with due recognition to the place, role, aspirations as their male partners. She suggests for strong implementation machinery for the achievement of women development.

V.S.Ganesamurthy (2008)⁷ In his book entitle “Empowerment of women in India ; social, economic and political,” the author emphasized on three determining factors of women development, viz. economic, social and political. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) called for a three prolonged strategy of social and economic empowerment and providing gender justice. The Govt. of India has initiated various schemes encompassing women’s need for safety, security, legal aid, justice, mental health etc. alongwith their financial needs through skill development, education (general and vocational) etc. In one hand, the multiple roles of women and on the other hand the meager accessibility of resources are areas of concern.

Pandya Rameshwari (2008)⁸ In the book entitled “Women Welfare and Empowerment in India: Vision for 21st Century” explained various policies and programs undertaken by Govt. of India covering strategies in gender development. Efforts have been made vigorously, but due to lack of coordination, the achievements are not satisfactory. India has created protective legislations for women, but the enactments are far from satisfactory level.

Therefore the socio-economic status of women is unsatisfactory with regards to various indicators of economic development .Sharma Arpita (2011)⁹ The article focused the challenges faced by women. It concluded that India is committed for the empowerment of women, but the journey is not smooth. Policies regarding educational opportunities, various employment schemes will pave the way for the empowerment of Indian women to some extent.

Sharma Sheetal (2006)¹⁰ Article depicted the scenario of rural India. In rural areas, women are generally confined to household duties and supposed to provide labour at a cheap price. Practically they are not economically independent.

Jamil Ahmed (2011)¹¹ This article observes the link between education and women empowerment. Education is considered as the strong foundation for women empowerment. The author conclude that at different stages of life, Indian women face challenges due to socio-cultural structure of the society. Therefore, economic empowerment for the women is essential to establish gender equality.

Sridevi T.O. (2005)¹² In this article, author studied various factors affecting the level of women empowerment like education, poverty, time spend in household work etc. He suggested that the society should understand the capabilities of women for realizing the actual potentiality of the society ensuring sustainable development.

Duflo Ither (2011)¹³ The author stresses the fact that development can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women. Again empowering women may benefit development. This paper reviews both sides of the empowerment- development nexus. It concludes with the continuous policy recommendations to equality.

Sen, Amartya (2001)¹⁴ In this paper, the author highlights that gender inequality is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of inter-linked problems. He explains the term ‘Natality Inequality’ which manifests the wants of parents to have a boy child rather than a girl. But through female education and female economic participation also, this concept may not be removed.

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