Volume : 2 | Issue : 9 | Sept 2013 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper | Management

Empowering Women Through Education

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ABSTRACT

The Indian education sector has been recognized as a "Sunrise Sector" for investment in the recent past. This recognition stems from the fact that the sector offers a huge untapped market in regulated and non-regulated segments due to low literacy rate, high concentration in urban areas and growing per capita income. The Government has also been proactively playing the role of facilitator in this sector. The higher education sector, owing to its huge potential, holds very promising prospects. With an estimated 150 mn people in the age group of 18-23 year. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

KEYWORDS: Education, Women, Government, Empowerment

Introduction:

"Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process."

—ICPD Programme of Action, paragraph 4.2

Empowering women through education is one of the most crucial concerns of the Millennium Development Goal on gender equality. The United Nations and its agencies have long encouraged the world community to discourage gender stereotypes and to strengthen the status of women within the family and in society as a whole. One of the key ways of doing so is by supporting the education of women, and especially girls.

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Gender bias in education:

Education is widely recognized as the gateway to economic security and opportunity- particularly for girls and women.

World figures in literacy relate a sorry tale. Of the 130 million 6-11 year-old children not in school - a majority - 60 percent are girls. The figures only go to show how in most regions of the world, specially the developing societies, gender bias impinges on girls' education.

The foremost factor limiting female education is poverty. Economics plays a key role when it comes to coping with directs costs such as tuition fees, cost of textbooks, uniforms, transportation and other expenses. Wherever, especially in families with many children, these costs exceed the income of the family, girls are the first to be denied schooling.

All this despite the fact that educating girls is one of the best investments a society can make. An educated woman has the skills, the self-confidence and the information she needs to become a better parent, worker and citizen.

Girls' lack of access to education isn't always related to scarcity of places in schools. It also emerges from expectations, attitudes and biases in communities and families. Economic costs, social traditions, and religious and cultural beliefs limit girls' educational opportunities. Whatever the underlying reason(s), having large number of girls outside the formal schooling system brings developmental challenges to both current and future generations. Individuals, families, communities and nations are affected. Inability to read, write and calculate complicates a girl's efforts to engage in both market-focused production and household activities as effectively and efficiently possible. This affects her family's welfare and diminishes her potential contribution to the development of the household, local and national economy.

Women empowerment through education:

The world of humanity has two wings one is women and other man. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. The Baha'I writings

This statement clearly focused on the importance of women in our society .Women constitute an important segment of any community and perform multiple role as mother, housewife, and wages earners .Women are important productive workers in India's national economy de spite the fact that much of their work falls in the indivisible or un-organized category. In reference to Women, the concept of "EMPOWERMENT" is a global issue and discussions on women's right are fore front of many formal and informal campaigns world wide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in1985 .Women Empowerment has five components: -

- Women's sense of self worth
- Their right to have and to determine choices
- Their right to have access to opportunities and resources
- Their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home
- And their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order ,nationally and internationally

Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables

them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Empowerment is an active and multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all sphere of life .Empowerment of women is very much essential to achieve sustainable development. Quoting UNFPA report, "the state of world population 1992", the News of Bernard Van Leer Foundation says, that there can be no sustainable development without development of women , because it is women who contribute most for development for children.

Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. Education is the first step towards empowerment and the most crucial factor in over all development of the individual as well as nation. Literacy sets one free from ignorance, exploitation and poverty .It liberates the minds , opening up new horizon ,new hope/ opportunities and self –confidence further equipping them with the knowledge ,skills , self respect and freedom to participate sustain and excel in their life .Illiteracy on the other hand ,breeds ignorance ,which ,leads to exploitation ,poverty, neglect crimes and number of social evils . Literacy deprives women formal opportunities and further prospects of leading a meaningful life and enjoying good standard of living. Education is an effective instrument for social and economic development and national integration. Education enables women to understand their social and legal rights, become economically independent,, acquire a voice in the affairs of the family and the community. Education is a gateway to information, opportunities and empowerment

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women:
The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Through the implementation of various programme and policies it can be said that education is a cornerstone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives.

Educating women benefits the whole of society. It has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men's education. It is also the most influential factor in improving child health and reducing infant mortality.

Women's education also has an effect on family size. The more years of education a woman has, the fewer children she tends to bear.

Equity in Education: Gender Equity
Women constitute 48% of the total population of India. The principle of gender equity is enshrined in Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental, rights, fundamental duties and directive principles and also reducing the gender gap in higher education is a focus area.

The enrolment :
women students - 56.49Lakhs constituting **41.40%** of the total enrolment (Of the total women enrolment, 14.72% women have been enrolled in professional courses.)

States
-Highest in Goa (59%) and
-Lowest in Bihar (30%).

Status of Women in Higher Education
There has been a phenomenal growth in a number of women enrolled in higher education since independence.

Women enrolment:
- was less than 1**0%** of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence and it has risen to **41.40%**.

Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child for pursuing higher and technical education
-To support higher education through scholarships to such girls who happen to be the **only child in their families** and also to promote small family norms. Girl students up to the age of 30 years at the time of admission of Postgraduate courses are only eligible.

The scholarship amount is @ Rs.2000/- p.m. for 20 months. Rs.4.88 lakhs has been provided as scholarship to beneficiaries and even Construction of Women Hostels for Colleges

Capacity Building for Women Managers in Higher Education
The overall policy goal is to increase the participation of women in higher education management including in faculty, administration and staff for better gender balance, to sensitize the higher education system through policies and procedures which recognize gender equity and to involve women capable of becoming administrators for the qualitative development of higher education.

During XI Plan, three approaches are being followed, namely;
- To offer training programmes focused on increasing sensitivity to gender issues in
  respect of women managers
- To make capacity building a women's movement.
- To involve Vice-chancellors of the Universities or Principals of the concerned

Colleges in the development of the programme.
The capacity building is through activities like sensitization, awareness, motivation workshops, development and distribution of resource material, research stimulation workshops, management skill workshops etc.

Despite the clear advantages of female education, parents tend to prefer to educate their sons. A girl's role in life is often perceived solely as a link to the household; formal education may thus be seen as a waste of resources. She is also likely to marry into another family and take with her any advantages she gains from education.

Although literacy and school enrolment among both girls and boys has increased dramatically, much remains to be done. At least 60 million girls lack access to primary education. And the gender gap in literacy persists: More than two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterates are women.

Reason of increasing Gap between male and female literacy in India:
- Poverty is attributes as one of the main cause of deprivation of girls from education .They need to either take care of their siblings at home , and do household work and work outside and contribute financially to the family . A recent report on the extent and depth child poverty in the developing world found there be some 135 million children between 7 and 18 years old without any education at all , with girls 60%more likely than boys (16 % compared 10%) to be so "educationally deprived".
- Inadequacy school facilities is another barrier .According to the report ,44% of the school do not have play ground .54% of the

school did not have drinking water,72% of the school did not have library ,84% school did not have toilet and 2% of a school have single teacher. Parents are hesitant to send their girls to schools that have only male teacher.

- Lack of qualified female teacher is a major barrier to girls education .
- Fear of sexual harassment is another aspect in deterring girls from attending schools and a factor contributing to the high droop out rate .
- Fixed schooling hours do not suit girls in rural areas, as they are need for domestic work at home or in farms and fields during these hours. This is one of the cause of the lower participation rates of girls in education.

Educational programmes and policies:

Educational programmes for both boys and girls must promote shared responsibilities. From the moment they begin their education, boys need to be taught to take care of their own domestic needs and to share responsibilities in the home. Educating both boys and girls in non-stereotyped thinking about male and female roles is critical.

Men -- as legislators, decision-makers in ministries of education, school administrators, participants in the design of educational curricula, teachers and fathers -- have a critical role to play. They must make sure that girls are able to go to school, stay in school, and are taught the skills they need to succeed in the workplace and the world at large on equal terms. Men also must teach boys new ways to think about their roles and about women in this rapidly changing world, hence various measures has been suggested by the national policy for the empowerment of women through education. These are some measures:

- Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured.
- Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women.
- Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes/Minorities.
- Gender sensitive curricula would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

CONCLUSION AND SUGESSIONS:

At present when we talk about 21st century , and women empowerment , we feel very embarrassing when we see a women in a very pitiable condition in our society on the other side we feel very proud when she gains a highest position and represent our nation . If we want to realize women empowerment Firstly we will try to minimize the literacy gap between man and women and give priority to educate a woman. So that education plays a crucial role in accelerating the women empowerment .Thus education seen as "Unique investment" in present and future in reference to Women Empowerment.

The National Policy on Education states that Education will be used as driving force of basic change in the status of women in society .Access and equality are the two most important components to empower women and to facilitate the delivery of social justice to them . If we want to achieve and sustain a high growth rate, must have educate women without any discrimination

Men's support for women's empowerment is essential: Men hold the majority of positions of power in societies throughout the world. Too often the fight for women's empowerment is viewed as one for women to wage alone. Men must understand that gains for women benefit all of society.

Education can provide boys with a different interpretation of masculinity, replacing the one based on domination to one defined by shared responsibility. Education can provide girls with increased opportunities to make informed decisions for themselves. Offer a girl education and she has the power to make choices. Offer her a nurturing environment in which to grow and she can change her society for the better. Offer her reproductive health services and she and her future children will enjoy a healthier tomorrow.

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