



## Human Development and Women Empowerment

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### ABSTRACT

*World Bank Report 2000/2001 describes empowerment as a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. According to country report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power".*

*In the simplest of words Women Empowerment is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Empowerment is the one of the key factors in determining the success of development is the status and position of women in the society. Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. A woman is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. These days, women have established themselves that they are equal to men. They have now forsaken their homely image and are making a major contribution to global innovation of the country. They are working in different fields with man by doing hard work. It is said that women are the pillars of the economy of the world. Women empowerment and human development both are mutually inter-dependent. Infarct women empowerment contributes to human development. Every woman is the back bone of her house. When each household is strengthened, it ultimately leads to a healthy and well being society. At the same time human development promotes women empowerment by providing balanced diet, healthy life style, educational opportunities, social security, employment guarantee and freedom to exercise political and economical will.*

**KEYWORDS : Women Empowerment, Human Development, Educational Opportunities, Gender Inequality, Health, Economy, Social Security, Employment Guarantee, Freedom.**

### Introduction:

According to McLeod, the concept 'Empowerment' derives from Latin word 'potere' which means "to be able". When viewed in sociological aspect, empowerment is a multi-dimensional, multi-tiered and multifaceted concept. The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts. World Bank Report 2000/2001 describes empowerment as a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. According to country report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power". In simple words women empowerment is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society.

One of the key factors in determining empowerment is the success of development in status and position of women in the society. First and foremost human right is gender equality. A woman is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty.

India, which is a conglomerate of diverse ethnic, linguistic and geographical features, today is at the cusp of a paradigm change in its growth and its position in the world. However, India is even known for its sobriquet 'male-chauvinistic nation'. Indian myths describe our country as 'Mother India' who is a woman that serves as the mother of every Indian. While such a woman looks after every Indian child, women in general are simply being disregarded at the dominant men's best.

But we should not forget that history is a witness to the women who have in the past demonstrated unique leadership capabilities. Razia Sultana, Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai, Sarojini Naidu and Indira Gandhi are the examples of women empowerment. Earlier, most women were able to demonstrate the leadership qualities only on their home fronts, as in Indian society man has always acted as the master of the scene and the decision regarding the issue of empowering women has always been taken by him. Famous American novelist of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Louisa May Alcott correctly opines- "When women are the advisor, the Lords of creation don't take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do; then they act upon it and if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it; if fails, they generously give herself the whole".

God has gifted women with compassion, tender-heartedness, caring nature, concern for others. These are very positive signs which imply that women can be leaders. Though some women have shown their mettle yet a large number of them have to sharpen their leadership qualities in various ways. In order to help women to be in limelight, they need to be empowered. Therefore, empowerment of women is the prerequisite to transform a developing country into a developed country.

These days, women have established themselves that they are equal to men. They have now forsaken their homely image and are making a major contribution to global innovation of the country. They are working in different fields with man by doing hard work. It is said that women are the pillars of the economy of the world.

Empowerment of women had come out of the consensus arrived at the 40th Session of the UN commission on status of women in New York on March 11, 1996. In this session 'Empowerment of Women' has been depicted as conferment of power by means of law in all matters affecting gender interests, related to family well-being and socioeconomic national affairs, providing for participation in decision making in all such matters.

### Gender equality and women empowerment:

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence, have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses, enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions.

A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives.

Women empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Where women's status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. Population and development and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations.

The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined. They are socially determined, changing and changeable. Although they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and change over time.

### **Need for Women Empowerment:**

The need for women empowerment was felt in India long back. Raja Rammohan Roy, the religious, social, and educational reformer and 'the maker of Modern India', demanded inheritance of property rights for Women and gave tremendous effort to abolish the defunct custom 'Sati', the Hindu funeral practice. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, key figure of Bengali Renaissance, championed the uplift of the status of women in India. Jyotirao Phule, Pearicharan Sarkar etc also fought for uplift of women. Later, Mahatma Gandhi had announced at the Second round table conference that his aim was to establish a political society in India, in which women would enjoy the same rights as men and the teeming millions of India would be ensured dignity, social, economic and political justice.

Empowerment of women needs to begin with her participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated and aware of their rights and privileges in a modern society. It is education which can bring about awareness in them related to their social status, injustice and differentiation meted out to them. Besides, economic independence is a major factor which can contribute in empowering women. India in the very beginning realised this need.

The architect of Indian Constitution was of the opinion that unless and until women are empowered, nothing was going to bring about any change in their destiny. 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 adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. According to the 2001 Census, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54% up from 9% 1951 by implementation of several constitutional privileges, legislative support for women, and some yojana and mission.

The need for women's empowerment arises from the subordinate position they have been accorded for a long time. The empowerment has been felt as a tool to bring about changes in their socio-economic condition. It has been felt on the part of nation as well as individual that no society can progress till women, a major constituent of society, lag behind.

### **Human Development:**

The principal objective of development planning is human development and the attainment of standard of living for the people. This requires a more equitable distribution of development benefits and opportunities, better living environment and empowerment of the poor and marginalised. There is a special need to empower women who can act as catalysts for change.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, standards of living, and quality of life for countries worldwide. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, a developing or an underdeveloped country, and also to measure the impact of economic policies on quality of life.

### **Gender Inequality Index:**

India's poor performance on women's empowerment and gender equality is reflected in many indicators. In many parts of the country, sex ratio has dropped to fewer than 850 females per 1000 males. India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Inequality Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. Women from dis-

advantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities in particular face discrimination, exploitation and limited employment opportunities. Our work recognizes that women are by no means a homogenous category. UNDP argues that where development is not 'engendered' it is 'en-dangered'. As a result it is ensured that vulnerable women benefit from all initiatives.

### **Human Development and Women Empowerment:**

Women empowerment and human development both are mutually inter-dependent. In fact women empowerment contributes to human development. Every woman is the back bone of her house. When each household is strengthened, it ultimately leads to a healthy and well being society. At the same time human development promotes women empowerment by providing balanced diet, healthy life style, educational opportunities, social security, employment guarantee and freedom to exercise political and economical will.

In India government has been operationalising this approach through legislative and programmatic interventions as well as by main streaming gender into the development planning process. Major advancements over the years are the following:

### **Education for women:**

The SSA has had positive outcomes for girl child education. Enrolment of girls at primary level and upper primary level increased over the years. Data also shows that the number of girls in schools in the age group of 5-14 years has increased from 79.6 percent in 2004-05 to 87.7 per cent in 2009-10. Similarly the number of girls in the educational system in the 15-19 years age group increased from 40.3 percent to 54.6 percent and in the age group 20-24 years from 7.6 percent to 12.8 percent over the same period.

The National Literacy Mission or Saakshar Bharat targeted female literacy as a critical instrument of women's empowerment. This has led to an increase in literacy amongst women from 53.67 per cent (Census 2001) to 65.46 per cent (Census 2011). For the first time out of the total of 217.70 million literates added during the decade, women (110.07 million) outnumbered men.

### **Health:**

Implementation of the NRHM has resulted in an improvement in many development indicators for women. As per the India Human Development Report, fertility rates have come down and have reached replacement levels in a number of states; MMR has come down to 212 per 100,000 live births in 2009 from 301 in 2003. IMR, though still high, has fallen to 50 per 1000 in 2009. Institutional deliveries have risen from 39 percent in 2006 to 78 per cent in 2009.

### **Women and the economy:**

The participation of women in the workforce, the quality of work allotted to them, and their contribution to GDP are indicators of the extent of their being mainstreamed into the economy. The National Skill Development Programme (NSDP) has identified 231 modular courses for women. It is critical that the training has relevance to the changing labour markets. Efforts are needed to link skill development programmes to the NSDP to ensure relevance and enhance employability. An important strategy for financial inclusion of women, which is crucial for their integration into the economy, has been micro-finance. The model encourages access of SHGs to bank both as a means of savings and as providers of loan services. By March 2010, 69.53 lakh SHGs including those formed under the SGSY had been covered under the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development's (NABARD) SHG-bank linkage programme. Of these 76 per cent are exclusively women SHGs, accounting for 72.5 per cent of savings and 82 percent of outstanding loans.

### **Gender Budgeting (GB):**

Recognizing that women, constituting 48 percent of India's population, lag behind men on many social indicators like health, education, and economic opportunities and warrant special attention due to their vulnerability and lack of access to resources, GB, as a tool for achieving gender mainstreaming, has been adopted by the government in 2005. GB is not an accounting exercise but an ongoing process to ensure that the benefits of development reach women as much as men. It entails incorporating a gender perspective at all levels and stages of the budgetary process. The first step in this di-

rection was the establishment of Gender Budgeting Cells in 56 ministries/ departments at union level. A significant breakthrough was the introduction of the GB Statement in 2005-06, which is placed in parliament with the Union Budget documents every year. It serves as a reporting mechanism and provides an indication of the funds flowing to women. Over the years, the number of ministries/ departments reporting in the GB Statement has gone up from 9 (2005-06) to 29 (2011-12). The magnitude of GB allocations as a percentage of total budget has also gone up from 2.79 percent in 2005-06 to 6.22 per cent in 2011-12.

#### **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):**

The NMEW is a mission to facilitate the process of coordination of all the women's and socio – economic development programmes across ministries and department, was launched on 8 March 2010 to ensure economic and social empowerment of women. The NMEW is piloting the 'convergence model' across the country in 32 selected districts with the aim of bridging the gap between demand and supply of women – related services by undertaking realistic estimates of the demand, creating greater awareness about women-based schemes and programmes of the government, augmenting the demand for various services/ schemes for women, and connecting them with the service providers. The model includes introduction of convergence-cum-facilitation centres for women at district, tehsil/ block and village levels. The first such pilot convergence project was launched in Pali district in Rajasthan on 16 September 2011 with the opening of 150 village-level centres.

#### **Empowered women aiding human development:**

Through human development women are empowered. These empowered women in turn contribute to human development .These are the following areas in which the effect is bound to occur.

#### **Freedom to take financial decisions:**

For example in rural areas, by participating in SHG they enjoy the opportunity to save hard earned money regularly, to manage their accounts regularly. Even in case of urban women freedom to purchase goods emanates from them being employed.

#### **Decision making power in household activities:**

An educated women and financially independent women can manage household activities effectively. With in family respect and status of women has also increased. Awareness on nutrition and sanitation has improved the health of family members and is contributing to sound economic status. Knowledge about qualified doctors is also causing them to get treatment at appropriate time and stop draining of their money.

#### **Active participation in community level activities:**

When there is a need of mass mobilisation for community requirements women had lended a helping hand. They have been successful in making gains for women's issues such as water, education for girls, health care (Rai, 2008).

#### **Participation in politics:**

Women have 33 % reservation in local bodies. By this women are actively engaging in politics and taking part in developmental activities.

#### **Conclusion:**

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the progress that has been made, six out of ten of world's poorest people are still women and girls, less than 16 percent of the world's parliamentarians are women, two thirds of all children shut outside the school gates are girls and, both in times of armed conflict and behind closed doors at home, women are still systematically subjected to violence. Women empowerment connotes "Economic Empowerment" which implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women, "social empowerment" which means a more equitable social status for women in society, "Legal Empowerment" that suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women's empowerment and "Political Empowerment" means a political system favouring the participation in, and control by women of the political decision making process and in governance.

The task is not too difficult to achieve. The honesty and sincerity on the part of those involved is a must. If the lots of women change, definitely it will have a positive impact on society. Hence, the women's empowerment is the need of the hour.

It would be worthy to conclude with the famous speech of Swami Vivekananda "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing."

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