



Sustainable Development Through Women Entrepreneurship

T. Bhagya Kumar

Principal I/C K.B.N Jr. College.

ABSTRACT

Sustainable development can be achieved with equitable distribution of resources today and tomorrow among men and women.. In the present day scenario sustainable development of women is considered as a landmark of progress for any country; hence the economic sustainability of women is of at most importance to social scientists, economists, policy makers, reformers and NGOs. The women entrepreneurs with the sustainable economic development are able to contribute to the family's, community's and the nation's development.

Here we like to highlight various issues those can establish women empowerment and strategies of empowering rural women.

KEYWORDS : Entrepreneurship – economic development- rural women empowerment- women education

I. INTRODUCTION

Women, who make up half of the world's population, have benefited more than men from the progress in economic and social development in the last three decades. Nevertheless they continue to be overrepresented among the world's most vulnerable groups, as access to resources and power remains highly skewed towards men. Gender equality is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. By providing the same opportunities to women and men, including in decision-making in all kinds of activities, a sustainable path of development can be achieved to ensure that women's and men's interests are both taken into account in the allocation of resources.

This paper focuses on women's empowerment as a key process in reaching gender equality and, through that, sustainable development. The next section discusses the concepts of strategies of empowering rural women.

II. EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPT AND ITS MEANING

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). (Baltiwalla, 1994).

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over these resources.

III. What is sustainable development?

In the late 1980s the report *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development defined the concept "sustainable development" as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations

to meet their own needs". While aiming to maximize the well-being of today's generation, it is important to take a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences of our actions for our children, their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the resources they will require for their own well-being are not depleted, and that the natural environment into which they will be born will not be polluted or destroyed. Sustainable development is conceptualized as resting on three inter-related pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. A fourth pillar– the preservation of cultural diversity has been proposed. This conceptual categorization can lead to treating these areas in isolation without accounting for a whole range of channels through which these pillars reinforce each other and bring about sustainable development. Instead, by taking an integrated and holistic approach to socioculturally responsible, environmentally-friendly economic development, and sustainable development can be revealed as a multifaceted and dynamic process.

IV. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PERSPECTIVE

The term empowerment pre-supposes primacy of power over other dimensions. We speak of women's sharing of political power and participation in government. An important issue related to women's empowerment is the reservation of seats for them in the state legislature and union parliament. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 has provided 33 percent seats for women in Panchayats and municipal bodies. Though the experience of the Indian Panchayat Raj Institutions, one million women have actively entered political life in India. Since the creation of the quota system, local women– the vast majority of the illiterates and poor– have come to occupy as much as 43 percent of seats– spurring the election of increasing numbers of women at the district, provincial and national level. Since the onset of PRI, the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen from 4-5 percent to 25-40 percent. According to an Indian writer and activist Devaki Jain, "the positive discrimination of Panchayat Raj Institutions has initiated a momentum of change. Women's entry into local government in such large numbers often more than the required 33 percent, and their success in campaigning, including the defeat of male candidates, has shattered the myth that women are not interested in politics, and have no time to meetings or to undertake all the other work that is required in political party processes. Panchayat Raj Institutions reminds us of central truth: power is not something people give away, it has to be negotiated, and some time wrested from the powerful." says Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of UNIFEM, "this is one of best innovations in grass-roots democracy in the world" (Women's Link, Jul. to Sept., 2003, p. 30). Seats in local bodies have been reserved for women for their active participation in decision-making, but the parliament has so far failed to provide a similar representation to women. Ugly scenes were witnessed over tabling the women's reservation bill that has brought the grim truth into sharper focus that Indian society continues to be male dominated and male hegemony is still the dominated reality. In India, the participation of women in politics has actually been declined since the days of freedom movement (10%). It reached a high of 8 percent in 1984 elections. This figure has not crossed since then. The account of measures taken for women's empowerment in India clearly

shows that there is a deep concern in the country to uplift their social and economic conditions, so that they may plan an active role in the task of national developments. Government is not serious for the political participation of women; the data shows that they are lagging behind in political sphere.

V. STRATEGIES OF EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN

Empowerment of the rural women is a means to poverty alleviation. The goals of poverty eradication can be effectively achieved if rural women could be organized into groups for community participation as well as for assertion of their rights. Any strategy of sustainable development relating to poverty eradication has to involve the large number of poor women. Social mobilization and building organization of the poor are essential prerequisites for poverty alleviation. There are several strategies, which enable overall development of rural women. The following strategies were found more effective for overall development. They are:

- a) Empowerment of women through development of women and children in the rural areas/ Self-Help Groups.
- b) Empowerment of women through education and training.
- c) Empowerment through political participation.
- d) Empowerment evaluation as strategies of empowering women.

These different strategies are not independent and exclusive but used interactively.

a) Empowerment of women through DWCRA/SHG approach

Women's empowerment is used to alleviate poverty and other socio-economic issues. Self-Help movement through thrift and savings has been taken of as a mass movement under the government program of development of women and children in the Rural Areas (DWCRA), some of the State Governments assisted these self-help groups by providing revolving fund and helping them in micro-enterprise activities. DWCRA program of self-help groups helped the women to earn additional income. With improvement in economic status, there is enhancement in social status as well. These women show increased awareness of family welfare, promote their children nutritional and educational status, shows concern about environment and health, issues of sanitation and drinking water. Thus mobilizing the poor women in rural areas for self-help group formation neither State Government assisted SHGs or SHGs assisted by Non-Government Organization is an effort toward participation of women in poverty alleviation and subsequently increases their awareness towards various social problems. Building the common corpus is the first step toward empowerment of women. The Report of the Independent South Commission on Poverty Alleviation (1992), stated that when poor participate as subjects and not as objects of the development process, it is possible to generate growth, human development and equity, individually the poor women would not be able to overcome obstacles in their struggle for survival, security and self-respect, which they could do through collective action. The support mechanisms like government and non-government organizations provide the poor women a partnership. The poor collectively can start income generation activities with their own resources to achieve self-reliance with the support of this organization. Thus, starting from the socio-economic base the poor women show increasing awareness, cooperation, self-reliance, self management and move towards social consciousness, empowerment and self-respect. The emancipation of the rural women from economic and social bondage enables to become more productive. The establishment of a self-reliant activity will mutually reinforce the process of promoting positive attitudes and values.

b) Empowerment of women through education and training

One of the most critical components in the development of a society is the investment in human development. The South Asian countries are poorest, most illiterate, malnourished and least gender-sensitive. The Human Development Report on South Asia (1998) shows that South Asia has the lowest adult literacy rate (49%) in the world, which is lower than that of sub-Saharan Africa (57%). In India public primary education facilities have been expanded and national literacy shows an increase of 38 percent in 1991 to 65.38 percent in 2001. Participation of women in education program has grown faster than those of men. Female literacy increased two the half times faster than

male literacy between 1970 and 2001. However, these achievements are small as India still accounts for 30 percent of the total adult literates all over world, where 24 percent of girls of primary age are still not in school compared with 16 percent of boys. Poverty and other economic and social pressure continue to be the major challenge to the achievement of education for all. Keeping girls out of the school is costly and undermines developments. Poverty can be effectively tackled by educating the girls. Educated women keep their families healthier, show concern about their children's education and nutrition. Total literacy campaign started by the National Literacy Commission in some regions in India brought rapid social change. The Non-Government Organization (NGOs) plays a significant role in the area of education. To large extent the NGO activities have been confined to non-formal education sector. Now a partnership is emerging between the NGOs in the area of basic education as seen in the model of Lok Jumbish, a government sponsored project for primary education in Rajasthan. Various NGOs are participating in the formal education sector, for example, Action Aid, Plan International, Aga Khan Foundation etc. NGO action in primary education emphasizes delivery system of quality education to the marginalized people like, poor women and girls. Programs of formal and non-formal education are emphasized by the government in collaboration with local NGOs and the communities. The NGOs use the strategy of popular education in spreading knowledge among people. This is seen in people participation in developing "IEC" (Information, Education and Communication) package of spreading knowledge about HIV/AIDS, health promotion, environmental risks, etc. In the popular education, cultural forms of education are used like, drama, music, stories, etc. Popular education is effective in increasing awareness towards various social issues like, immunization, girls education, sexual harassment, etc. Popular education can be applied anywhere, adapting to local context, the ideology and culture of the people with in the existing political system. Thus, the NGOs can play a significant role in empowering women through education and training and it is also the basis in the strategy of women's participation in political field.

c) Political participation and empowerment

There is low representation of women at all levels of political institutions. Women still face major obstacles in seeking higher positions in society. Political participation is a human right, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Women are poorly represented at different levels of political life and decision-making. Thus, there is widespread neglect of women's priorities by politicians and bureaucrats. As per the Human Development Report, 1999 women hold only 12.7 percent of the world's parliamentary seats and only 8.7 percent of those in the least developed countries. In India, the process of politically empowering through reservation in the local bodies has helped in the wider mobilization. On many occasions, elected women have provided the leadership for organizing women and get their legitimate demands fulfilled like, widow pensions, gas connections, etc. There is a growing realization among the women that local elections are a means to bring positive change in their lives. In different parts of the country, the SHGs have jointly put a women candidate for the election in the local bodies such as Zila Parishad, Gram Panchayat, etc. Women are motivated to change the traditions. The women's political campaigns refer to solving the issues that affect their daily lives like safe drinking water, schools, health centres, roads, etc. some women have taken the agenda further by displaying a mature understanding of the contexts in which the political economy functions. In our society men, having attitudes resist the political empowerment of women. There is a feeling that women should only contest the reserved seats and not the general seats. In some parts of our country, there is some change, for example, women in the villages of the Hill State of Uttarakhand are waging their own political battle of assertion and articulation of identification. Several NGOs working in the areas try to educate women about the voting behaviour and election procedures. Elected women members learn to negotiate their new found positions in an inherently male dominated system, fighting the adverse institutionalized practices like, corruption. Women face many obstacles while contesting election such as sabotage, threats, boycott and pressure from family. However, women on gaining the political power can bring rapid change in the lives of other women and attain equality.

d) Empowerment evaluation and strategy of empowering women

Empowerment evaluation is the basis of empowering women and

community development. Empowerment evaluation reflects the process of participatory communication. SHG formation, popular education and political participation are all based on the process of participatory communication. Empowerment evaluation as a capacity building process is based on the principles of participatory inquiry research and evaluation. Its objective is to highlight community member's own knowledge and to empower them. This can be attained by participating the women in each stage of program development that is, need assessment program, objectives, implementation monitoring and evaluation. Empowerment evaluation would promote self-determination and community control. The traditional evaluation is done by the professional experts, usually for funding of the organization. It is a close decision-making process and community participation is limited to providing feedback. In the empowerment or participatory evaluation here is shared responsibility and decision making power lies with the participants. In the empowerment evaluation participants not only are evolved but also control the process. Despite its focus on self-determination and collaboration empowerment evaluation and traditional external evaluation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the empowerment evolution process produces a rich data source that enables a more complete external examination. Self-determination defines as the ability to decide one's own course in life, forms the basis of empowerment evaluation. It consists of numerous interconnected capabilities such as the ability to identify and express needs, establish goals or expectations and plan of action to achieve them, identify resources, make rational choices from various alternatives, take appropriate steps to pursue the objectives and evaluate the results. Women face resistance because of traditional social structures, norms and values. NGOs can facilitate the process by training the people. Training, facilitation, advocacy and liberation are the facets of empowerment. Liberation means being freed or freeing oneself from pre-existing roles and constraints. It often involves conceptualization of oneself and others. Empowerment evaluation can also be liberating, as women liberate them from traditional expectations and roles, find new opportunities in perceiving existing resources in a new light, and redefine their identities and future roles. Empowerment evaluation is a long-term process resulting in improvement of quality of life of community with support from development agencies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that rural women entrepreneurship is contributing not only to the sustainable development of women entrepreneurs but also to the sustainable development of the country's economy. It will enhance the status of SHG women and also the type of entrepreneurship. The success of women will contribute to the success of entrepreneurship in that local area market and added to the overall national economic development.

Rural women of India are intelligent, hard working, competent, rich with indigenous knowledge, potential and skilled persons. But the only requirement they needed is timely information, resources, finances, permissions, training with regard to technical knowhow, family support especially male members, Government's loan facility with proper interest and subsidy.