



Why Need Of Women Empowerment in India?

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ABSTRACT

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. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and to improved prospects for the next generation. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

Gender equality is acknowledged as being a key to achieving the other seven goals. Yet discrimination against women and girls - including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequities, and harmful traditional practices - remains the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. Women and girls bear enormous hardship during and after humanitarian emergencies, especially armed conflicts. There have been several organizations and institutions advocating for women, promoting legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, and supporting projects that improve women's health and expand their choices in life. Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

KEYWORDS : Intergenerational gender gaps

Political Empowerment

Economic empowerment

Understanding gender equality and women's 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's 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.

Key issues and linkages :

Reproductive health: Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a major -- but preventable -- cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.

Stewardship of natural resources: Women in developing nations are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.

Economic empowerment: More women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere. Educational empowerment: About two thirds of the illiterate adults in the world

are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

Political empowerment: Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women. Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic interventions at all levels of programming and policy-making.

Women's Work and Economic Empowerment :

In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty. In subsistence economies, women spend much of the day performing tasks to maintain the household, such as carrying water and collecting fuel wood. In many countries women are also responsible for agricultural production and selling. Often they take on paid work or entrepreneurial enterprises as well. Unpaid domestic work -- from food preparation to care giving -- directly affects the health and overall well being and quality of life of children and other household members. The need for women's unpaid labour often increases with economic shocks, such as those associated with the AIDS pandemic or economic restructuring. Yet women's voices and lived experiences -- whether as workers (paid and unpaid), citizens, or consumers -- are still largely missing from debates on finance and development. Poor women do more unpaid work, work longer hours and may accept degrading working conditions during times of crisis, just to ensure that their families survive.

Intergenerational gender gaps :

The differences in the work patterns of men and women, and the 'invisibility' of work that is not included in national accounts, lead to lower entitlements to women than to men. Women's lower access to resources and the lack of attention to gender in macroeconomic policy adds to the inequity, which, in turn, perpetuates gender gaps. For example, when girls reach adolescence they are typically expected to spend more time in household activities, while boys spend more time on farming or wage work. By the time girls and boys become adults; females generally work longer hours than males, have less experience in the labour force, earn less income and have less leisure, recreation or rest time. This has implications for investments in the next generation. If parents view daughters as less likely to take paid work or earn market wages, they may be less inclined to invest in their education, women's fastest route out of poverty.

Empowering Women through Education :

“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 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.

Education has far-reaching effects :

The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child. Besides having fewer children, mothers with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate. Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20- year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals.

Political Empowerment :

Throughout much of the world, women's equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women. Either by law or by custom, women in many countries still lack rights to: Own land and to inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend and stay in school. Earn income and move up in their work, free from job discrimination. Moreover, women are still widely under-represented in decision-making at all levels, in the household and in the public sphere. Addressing these inequities through laws and public policy is a way of formalizing the goal of gender equality. Legal changes, which most countries have now implemented, are often a necessary step to institute gender equality, but not necessarily sufficient to create lasting changes. Addressing the gaps between what the law proscribes and what actually occurs often requires broad, integrated campaigns.

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 favoring the participation in, and control by women of the political decision making process and in governance.

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