



COOPERATIVES AND THE SDGS: FOCUS ON GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ON HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

In today's economic condition, earning of a common man is not sufficient for the livelihood of the family. He has to be supported by the family members especially women in the family and decisions to be taken with their consent. Now, their income has now significantly increased. According to some of the women artisans, they are now able to sustain the family economically without the support their male counterpart. But, women artisans need support from the government for their development like focus around livelihoods, social development and good environment so that they can access to essential goods and services, meeting basic needs, higher productivity, sustainable earnings and greater empowerment. Empowerment is fulfilled when they have knowledge on account of health, education and affordable access to other public services such as justice, housing, civil rights, security, information and communications. Hope these women artisans will attain that very soon. Women work round the clock, in the process of crafting the articles then the male artisans but it is not considered or recognized. As these women artisans do not have a proper organised set up, schemes have not reached them. To address these and other related issues, the study is proposed with success case of women cooperatives and how it can be implemented with women handicraft artisans.

KEYWORDS : Cooperatives, Empowerment, Women artisans, Sustainable development goals.

Cooperatives are defined as 'autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'.

All cooperatives subscribe to a set of values and principles that support the social and people-focused nature of their activities. They are operated democratically by their members. Whether customers of the business, workers or residents, members have an equal say and a share of the profits.

Cooperatives are a powerful economic and social force, present in most countries of the world and in most sectors of the economy. The cooperative movement counts more than a billion members.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly **recognizes co-operative enterprises as important players** within the private sector to achieve the SDGs; Co-operatives are **partners to global, national, regional and local institutions** to achieve sustainable development;

The International Cooperative Alliance has identified targets within the 17 SDGs of most relevance to co-operatives, grouped into three main action areas: eradicating poverty, improving access to basic goods and services and protecting the environment and building a more sustainable food system.

Problems of Home-based women artisans

Home based women workers fall into two categories: (i) dependent workers who work on a piece rate and usually produce for a subcontractor or middle persons in a contract chain; and (ii) independent home based workers or own-account workers who produce goods for direct sale through street stalls, shops or the local village and sometimes to traders or sub contract (Haq, 2003)

The unplanned home-based workers represent an important part of working population. There are large number of income producing activities are included in home-based sector in which mostly women workers are engaged. Beedi making, textile, garment making, food processing, craft, coir work, dairy and chikan embroidery are included in these activities. Both in rural and urban areas, there is given very little importance to this unorganized sector and the signs of this sector are; the working conditions are unspeakable, the wages are extremely low and workers face great

worries and exploitations. Home based industrial work is one of the least regulated, least managed and risky, systems of industrial production however a large number of women workers are tired in this sector just because of lack of personal resources, like education and awareness, non-availability of employment opportunities, and normative practices which control women's mobility outside home. (Sarna & Shukla, 1994)

Liberalization has improved the employment opportunities for women in some sectors especially in the crafts sector. So there are increased the number of women in participation of home-base craft sector like in embroidery, lace making, weaving and printed textiles. In some cases empowerment of women also increases but in most cases, the working condition of the women workers is poor and they are paid less than men. (Krishnaraj, 1992 cited by Rao, 2005)

Women have a great work load in their lives; they have a double burden, to earn income from their work and also have to fulfill their domestic responsibilities. They laboring the whole day; generally they work 12 to 16 hours per day and losing their time and energy both. (Durand, 1975 cited by United Nations Economic and social commission for Asia and the pacific, 1987)

Being a embroidery skilled worker, their work requires women to sit long hours in the same position that resulting in eye, back bone, shoulders as well as other mental and emotional problems depending upon the physical environment in which these women live and work. (Sarna & Shukla, 1994)

Wage discrimination is obvious and usually common against women in Asia. Wage rates are as low as one-third or it may be observed that women always paid less of those paid to men. In Jobs also, there are described carefully to discriminate the labour practices involved; female positions typically require few skills and give poor salary. (United Nations Economic and social commission for Asia and the pacific, 1987)

In handicrafts the embroidery work is a traditional art but many women faced some difficulty of marketing their skill. Generally simple embroidery piece do not have sale value except it is the part of some readymade garments, complete form and other gift items. Then these workers must rely on the other persons to sale out for their exclusive crafts. Generally these persons are shop keepers, designers and exporters. Women of home-base producers also face

difficulty in this context because they are unadvertised and commonly people don't know them so they have only those customers to know them personally. (Gyanendra & Dastidar, 2000)

Crafts production is culturally recognized activity. The skills present in the economic sector and many women adopt and practice it. But they don't get to recognition and value not in the economy and not in the household level. They don't have any financial records, on average it accounts for less than one per cent of a household's income. This is not much to lead toward progress. There are too much women who participate in home-craft production but they just have little impact on it. There is also no visibility of proper place or infrastructure for marketing home-produced crafts. (Freedman & Wai, 1988)

In some traditional industries like jute and cotton textile, mechanization has contributed in the rejection of female employment. Women represent 90 percent of the workers in these industries such as the making of embroidery. But intermediaries and middlemen who provide the raw materials and market the final product, make them badly exploited by only paying the women minimal wages. (Bhatti n.d.; Indian Council of Social Science Research, 1975 cited by United Nations Economic and social commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1987)

Case Studies of Women Empowerment and Cooperatives

The Indian Farmers Fertilizer Co-operative Limited (IFFCO) in India is supporting women's economic participation. The co-operative pledges to promote self-help groups for women and arrange training programmes to improve women's skills in beekeeping, tailoring, embroidery, adult education, fruit and vegetable preservation, and computer literacy, among others.

The **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)** is a national union of 1.5 million informal women workers in 14 states of India founded in 1972.

SEWA operates through unions and cooperatives democratically run by women members. Starting with a financial services cooperative and a garment production cooperative, SEWA today promotes 115 cooperatives across India. The SEWA Cooperative Federation has 15 billion as members cooperatives in the artisanal, dairy, agriculture, financial, service and vendor sectors.

The Federation helps women organize and register their own cooperatives, supports new cooperatives, builds women's capacities to run their businesses, advocates at the political level for cooperative support and offers mentoring, marketing and networking opportunities.

Kilimanjaro Cooperative Bank Limited (KCBL) in Tanzania is owned by cooperatives, most of whom engage in coffee farming.

A top cash crop, coffee production is a male dominated industry, due to practices that restrict women land ownership and inheritance, though women do most of the farm work without payment or membership benefits from the cooperative. To empower women, the International Labour Organization's Coop Africa office, KCBL and Kenya Natural Foods Cooperative (KNFC) partnered to provide soft loans and training to select women's cooperative groups to help them diversify into crops not dominated by men. At the end of the project, 268 women were growing non-traditional produce such as mushrooms, dried fruit and rosella flowers, benefiting from reduced prices for inputs bought collectively and from new market linkages with the tourism sector.

SDG 5: Gender equality and women's empowerment through Cooperative

- The cooperative difference gender equality and women's empowerment stand alone as a goal, but are also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. Here the women are organized; their need and wants are identified.

- Women engage exponentially more in unpaid domestic work and care than men and are vastly underrepresented in leadership positions.
- In a review of 67 countries with data from 2009 to 2015, less than a third of senior- and middle-management positions were held by women.
- The cooperative model is well-suited to advancing women's economic participation in three key ways: increasing access to employment and work, enabling economic democracy and agency and boosting leadership and management experience and have an equal voice in decision-making processes.
- According to a recent study, nine of the biggest 100 cooperative and mutual insurers in the world have women CEOs, compared to only one of the top 100 stock company insurers.
- Co-operative enterprises all subscribe to the principle of voluntary and open membership, meaning that anyone can join a co-operative without fear of discrimination.
- These key aspects of the co-operative identity help make them drivers of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- The co-operative form of enterprise facilitates women's participation in local and national economies.
- Through credit unions and co-operative financial institutions, women can save and get access to financial services.
- The establishment of women's co-operatives are on the rise, particularly among domestic workers, who are often marginalized women in vulnerable economic and social situations.
- Co-operatives also help create employment, education, and training opportunities for women and girls who are usually excluded from the economy. They were provided need based training so that the women's talent will be exhibited for their economic development.
- Women also strengthen their leadership skills through co-operation by not only participating in their organization's governance, but by making decisions for members and their communities that increase their image as leaders and change makers.
- The levels of membership among women in co-operatives are proof of their potential for achieving SDG 5 as their active participation and involvement along with governance, decision making and participation.

Cooperative Implementation in Action

Many cooperatives are committing to achieve greater gender parity in their Boards of Directors and membership base: those companies are

- CIC Insurance Group in Kenya, Vancity and The Co-operators in Canada, and Reset Social Co-operative, Formula Servizi, Politecnica Engineering and Architecture Social Co-operative, and La Collina Social Co-operative in Italy.
- Co-operatives UK, the national apex organisation representing co-operatives in the United Kingdom, has pledged by 2020 to work with its members to achieve the goals of The Co-operative Women's Challenge, a campaign which seeks to ensure that women are fairly represented at all levels in the British co-operative movement.
- The goals include fair representation in democratic structures, more women in senior management roles, and campaign for gender equality across the economy and society.

Conclusion: Problems faced by these women artisans and their economic condition is very poor as there are unorganized, so how to prosper them were taken for study, they can develop themselves as well as their community in economic growth, create job opportunity and business enhancement and a source of livelihood of women artisans. Craft tourism can be developed. Concerning the industry the tours can be developed, but smaller villages including craft places in rural areas are still in the process of getting attention from tour operators and customers to become the new potential area/destinations for craft centre with cooperatives. The country needs to make the balanced linkage between villages, government including both local and central authority, tour companies,

universities and other stakeholders to strengthen this new type of craft tourism. NGOs should help the home based women workers to shape cooperatives. These cooperatives should supply raw materials, make sure appropriate and timely payments, arrange for the credit and support in design development. (Pitchai, 2013). There is an immediate need to arrange female workers into cooperatives and other organizations where production and marketing are included. Government institutions or voluntary welfare organizations must come forward to reduce such exploitation of women (Akilandeewari, 2014).

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