



## Womens' Empowerment and Economic Development

\* Dr. P. Gurusamy \*\* Ms. P. Manochithra

\* Professor & Head, Department of Corporate Secretaryship, Dr.N.G.P Arts and Science College, Coimbatore-48

\*\* M.Phil Scholar, Department of Corporate Secretaryship, Dr.N.G.P Arts and Science College, Coimbatore-48

### ABSTRACT

*Women's empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. Research on the relationship between employment and empowerment often focuses on access to employment opportunities and working conditions at the societal level, and on a woman's control over resources and contribution to total family earnings in the household. They conclude that research on the links between economic development and empowerment must include broader measures of education and empowerment and incorporate a greater breadth of social, household and life course factors relevant to gender and family relations. This paper reviews the literature on both sides of the empowerment-development nexus, and argues that the inter-relationships are probably too weak to be self-sustaining, and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.*

### Keywords : Empowerment, Economic and Development

#### INTRODUCTION

The persistence of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women". The term was coined by Amartya Sen in a now classic article in the New York Review of Books (Sen, 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men, as they do in Sub Saharan Africa. Today, it is estimated that 6 million women are missing every year (World Development Report, 2012) of these, 23 percent are never born, and 10 percent are missing in early childhood, 21 percent in the reproductive years, and 38 percent above the age of 60. Stark as the excess mortality is, it still does not capture the fact that throughout their lives, even before birth, women in developing countries are treated differently than their brothers, lagging behind men in many domains. For each missing woman, there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men.

#### RELAXING THE GRIP OF POVERTY THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The first way by which economic development reduces inequality is by relaxing the constraints poor households face, thus reducing the frequency at which they are placed in the position to make life or death choices. Because these tragic choices are often resolved at the expense of women's wellbeing, increasing the resources available to families, as economic development does, reduces the excess vulnerability of women.

Even in the countries where the preference for boys is strongest, the evidence that girls systematically receive less care than boys under normal circumstances is not as clear-cut as one might guess. It is, of course, very difficult to observe whether, for example, girls are given less to eat than boys, since households under observation are likely to change their

behavior. Also, when asked to keep diaries of how much each member consumes over a given period, households may misreport the portions given to boys and girls. Finally, households may give the same amount to boys and girls, but girls' needs may be different.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, FERTILITY, AND MATERNAL MORTALITY

Other than pre-birth and in early childhood, women are most likely to be missing relative to men in childbearing years. This, of course, is not the result of active discrimination, but due to the fact that women carry children and give birth, and that in itself is a dangerous activity. Other than directly affecting the welfare of women (and not men) in a significant way, maternal mortality is potentially a source of lower parental investment in childhood: if parents expect girls to be much more likely to die as young women than boys, they may be more inclined to invest in boys.

Overall, fertility decreases with income and education and age at first birth increases. Age at first birth is a risk factor in maternal mortality: very young mothers are more likely to die or have complications in childbirth. Fertility has declined dramatically in most developing countries over the last two decades, with few countries now having a total fertility rate of 6 or higher. That in itself has had a mechanical impact in reducing the number of missing women by decreasing the number of chances a woman has to die during her childbearing years.

#### GIVING WOMEN HOPE BY EXPANDING THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

The fact that women have fewer opportunities in the labor market may contribute to their unequal treatment in the household. Parents have lower aspirations for their daughters than for their sons, and teenagers themselves have lower aspirations. If women do not work outside the home, there may be a perception that they do not need to be as strong and healthy and that they do not need a formal education.

Interviews of parents in five states in north India conducted for the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in India (The probe Team, 1999), found that as high as 10 percent of them believed that it was not important for girls to be educated—only up to 1 percent believed the same for boys. Fifty-seven percent wanted their sons to study “as far as possible,” while only 28 percent wanted the same for their daughters.

Many parents believed that educating girls is not necessary, since girls are only expected to marry and take care of their households. In the Beaman et al (2011) study, 32% of the parents reported that they wanted their teenage boys to graduate from secondary school or college, and only 18% wished the same for their girls.

### IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON WOMEN'S STATUS

As stated by Pradhan and Abraham (2005) “Recent empirical advancement in growth economics emphasized that the key factors in modern economic growth is the productive and efficient use of human resources. The role of women's status is very crucial, as they constitute an important supply of human capital”. They have very emphatically brought about the relation between economic development and women's status by using econometric model and thereafter using regression model but to my understanding the results would have been more emphatic if different dimensions of women's status were related to economic development. They have basically concentrated on educational and professional training for jobs to be the main contributor to nation's economic. Going about to assess women's status along with assessing their status in every dimension means that we can gauge where women need more attention and where our policies need to be concentrated be it health, education, economic, demographic or political spheres.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Empirically, there is a strong correlation between economic development and women's legal rights, in areas as diverse as property rights, access to land, access to bank loans, violence against women, abortion policy, etc. Doepke and Tertilt (2009) show a robust negative correlation of 0.4 or higher across countries between the lack of rights and GDP per capital. Historically, the expansion of economic rights to women in the US and Europe preceded their access to political rights.

While it is of course impossible to infer causality from the data, two lines of argument suggest why economic growth could lead men to willingly surrender economic rights to their wives. Doepke and Tertilt (2009) argue that when the importance of human capital in the economy increases (with technological progress), men start to be willing to surrender some rights to women to ensure that children get better educated (the argument requires that women care more about children's human

capital and that bargaining power matter for household decisions, which we will discuss below).

The tradeoff is between their utility today, and the utility of their offspring (children, grandchildren, and future generations). Fernandez's (2009) argument is slightly different, although related: she argues that as fertility declines, fathers' interest as husbands (who would like to have all the rights), start to conflict with their interest as fathers (who would like to protect their daughters against their future son-in-laws). With economic growth and a decline in fertility, the balance starts tilting towards the latter interest, and women's economic rights are expanded.

Empirically, there remains much more to be done, and this is a very interesting area of research. These two papers provide convincing theoretical arguments; however, that economic growth can lead to a progression in women's rights.

### CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment and economic development are closely interrelated. While development itself will bring about women's empowerment, empowering women will bring about changes in decision-making, which will have a direct impact on development. Contrary to what is claimed by some of the more optimistic policy makers, it is, however, not clear that a one-time impulsion of women's rights will spark a virtuous circle, with women's empowerment and development mutually reinforcing each other and women eventually being equal partners in richer societies.

On the one hand, economic development alone is insufficient to ensure significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment, in particular, significant progress in decision-making ability in the face of pervasive stereotypes against women's ability. On the other hand, women's empowerment leads to improvement in some aspects of children's welfare (health and nutrition, in particular), but at the expense of some others (education).

This suggests that neither economic development nor women's empowerment is the magic bullet it is sometimes made out to be. Equity between men and women is only likely to be achieved by continuing policy actions that favor women at the expense of men, possibly for a very long time. While this may result in some collateral benefits, those benefits may or may not be sufficient to compensate the cost of the distortions associated with such redistribution. This measure of realism needs to temper the positions of policy makers on both sides of the development/empowerment debate. This may not be the most comforting message to deliver, but may be necessary to prevent the backlash that failed miracle solutions generally attract of pervasive stereo types against women's ability.

### REFERENCES

- Cuberes, David, and Marc Teignier-Baqué, 2011, “Gender Equality and Economic Growth,” Background Paper for the World Development Report 2012. | Basu, Kaushik. 2006. “Gender and Say: A Model of Household Behavior with | Endogenously Determined Balance of Power.” *Economic Journal* 116 (511): | 558–580. | Rao, N. “Empowering through Organization: Women Workers in the Informal Sector”, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 3 (2), 1996. | Giri, Mohini, *Emancipation and Empowerment of women*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 19 | Government of India.15. National Human Development Report, 2001 of planning commission, Govt. of India March 2002. | National Human Development Report, 2001 of planning commission, Govt. of India March 2002