



International Journal of Home Science

ISSN: 2395-7476
IJHS 2020; 6(1): 224-228
© 2020 IJHS
www.homesciencejournal.com
Received: 19-11-2019
Accepted: 21-12-2019

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Gender equality and women empowerment: Key for nation building

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Abstract

Gender equality is a human right which entitles all persons irrespective of their gender to live with dignity and with freedom. Gender equality is also a precondition for all round development and reducing poverty. Empowered women make invaluable contribution to the improvement of health conditions and educational status and productivity of whole families and communities, which in turn improve prospects for the next generation. 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. Long-term, sustainable development will only be possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunity to rise to their potential. But today, women and girls continue to face disadvantages in every sector in which we work, while in some cases, boys are falling behind. Addressing women's issues also requires recognizing that women are a diverse group, in the roles they play as well as in characteristics such as age, social status, urban or rural orientation and educational attainment. Putting resources into poor women's hands while promoting gender equality in the household and in society results in large development payoffs. Expanding women's opportunities in public works, agriculture, finance, and other sectors accelerates economic growth, helping to mitigate the effects of current and future financial crises.

Keywords: Gender equality, sustainable development, educational attainment

Introduction

Indians ancient ascribes status of women as Laxmi, Durga and Saraswati who are three great Goddesses of prosperity, power and wisdom respectively. The ancient scriptures declared that "God live where women are worshipped". Now a day's women play an important role in entire family affairs.

Empowerment is a process in which people acquire social, economic and political power to liberate themselves from injustices in society (Wallerstein, 1992) ^[18]. Empowerment is a situation in which people, organizations and communities acquire the needed control over the problems that affect them (Rappaport 1987; Zimmerman, 1995) ^[14, 20]. The concept of empowerment cannot be understood just as a single definition. The concept of empowerment must be understood in relation to the specific needs of the people who are yearning for empowerment (Kabeer, 2005) ^[7].

Women empowerment is a situation in which women are given the opportunity to participate fully in social, political and economic spheres of life (Sushama, 1998) ^[16]. Women empowerment simply means increasing educational opportunities of women's that they are able to make meaningful decisions about themselves and their families (Pathak 2003). Women have collectively struggled against direct and indirect barriers to their self-developments and their full social, political and economic participation. The constitution of India provided for equal and privileges for men and women and makes special provisions for women to help them to improve their status in society (Afshar, 1991) ^[1].

Science and technology have a profound effect on the search for feasible pathways towards sustainable and inclusive development strategies. Inclusive development is the one where all sections of the society irrespective of gender are included without any bias. However, the impact of science and technology on societies has not yet been uniformly beneficial. Policies and plans for the use of science and technology for inclusive development is gender insensitive

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and do not respond to the needs and aspirations of both men and women equitably. Women's concerns and interests still appear to be unrecognized. Failure to recognize the differential impact of technical change on the lives of men and women is likely to have a negative impact on the development process as a whole.

The development indicators that measure their quality are improving: maternal mortality rates are declining, women's literacy is increasing. More and more women have access to healthcare and education. But change is heartbreakingly slow when seen in the context of the continuing discrimination and violence women encounter in this country. India ranks 113 (out of 135 countries) on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. According to India's 2011 census, the sex ratio for children under six was 914 females to 1,000 males, a disturbing decline from 927 in 2001. The ranking of Indian women in economic empowerment is 0.3 where 1.0 signifies equality.

This is a dangerous state of affairs for any society. The lower economic status of women is alarming enough; their decline in the gender ratio is morally reprehensible. By denying women the opportunities they need to fulfill their potential, a vast economic asset is being ignored-human capital. Women are undoubtedly the foundation of the basic unit of society-the family. Even in traditional roles, they demonstrate immense innovation, skill and intelligence-in addition to hard work and commitment. Harnessing these attributes, India can effectively roll out a virtuous cycle of inclusive and equitable growth.

Neglecting the talent, the creative power and the social harmonizing potential of women-i.e. half of the world's population-is an unforgivable waste. It has to be considered as the fifth-or maybe the first-of the "global intolerable", as a most serious social disease. Examples of this disease may be quoted as: deficit of women scientists at top level university management and professorial posts; practical exclusion of women scientists in development policy creation; discrimination against women scientists in recruitment for leading positions in research; feminization of professions with low resources, status and capacity to generate excellence in research and education; and ignoring women scientists in delivering awards and other forms of recognition (Mizan, 1994) [9].

At the turn of the millennium, the whole world is going through a major historical transformation of a multidimensional nature: scientific and technological, economic, social, cultural, political and geopolitical. While some people see in this rapid and global changing process the seeds of a new, modern and more fair society, others remind us that it is actually increasing social inequality and exclusion of large groups of people, and building a polarised world, with no possible reversal in the near future. In this context, there is a growing concern about the present and future development of science and technology, a preoccupation about how to establish a positive and concrete relationship between science and technology, human rights and ethical values; create a synergetic interaction between productivity, solidarity, safety and peace, that settled the ground for a sustainable an inclusive development in all countries and regions.

Education extends to skills development and life lessons in basic necessities such as healthcare and sanitation. An exemplary model is the network of ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers created under the National Rural Health Mission. As trained female community health activists

who engage with villagers, they have played a crucial role in improving the health of women and children across India (Young *et al.*, 1993) [19].

Gender Equality: A Cornerstone of Development

Gender equality is defined as the process of "leveling the playing field for both men and women so that all sexes" are able to develop their talents in a given geographical environment (UNICEF, 2008) [17]. Gender equality, as another form of women empowerment, means according women equality of opportunity and removing obstacles that hinder women from participating fully in commerce, education, politics and culture (Backhams, 2007) [4]. Studies have shown that gender equality is addressed by giving women more access to land, credit market and labour opportunities (Morrison *et al.*, 2007) [10]. Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. Women are 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 Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is acknowledged as being a key to achieving the other seven goals (Anand, 1992) [2].

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 (Rappaport, 1984) [13].

Key Issues of Promoting Gender Equality

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 India and 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.

Empowerment throughout the life cycle: Reproductive health is a lifetime concern for both women and men, from infancy to old age.

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.

Gender equality can be achieved by

- Educating girls
- Increasing literacy rates among women
- Increasing early childhood development
- Interventions
- Increasing women's labor force participation and strengthening labor policies affecting women
- Improving women's access to credit, land and other resources
- Promoting women's political rights and participation
- Expanding reproductive health programs and family support policies

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women (MDG 3)

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3, the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, is the only MDG

that is both a goal in itself and recognized as essential to the achievement of all the other Millennium Development Goals. An educated mother, for example, can have a positive effect on her child's educational opportunities. What's more, enhancing women's access to credit and finance, as well as their ability to inherit or own land, can unlock the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs.

Global progress on achieving MDG 3 is lagging. Although gender parity in primary education at the global level is close to being achieved, gender disparities in secondary and post-secondary education remain high in certain developing regions. Eliminating gender disparity at all education levels by 2015 may still be possible, but the other indicators for MDG 3 show that progress is slow. For example, in parliamentary representation, although the global proportion of seats held by women continues to rise slowly-averaging 20.4 percent as of January 2012-one third of developing countries still have less than 10 percent-or no-female representation in their parliament at all (Farlane & Fehir, 1994) [8].

Hindrances of Women Empowerment: The main Problems that were faced by women in past days and still today up to some extent:

1. Gender discrimination
2. Lack of Education
3. Female Infanticide
4. Financial Constraints
5. Family Responsibility
6. Low Mobility
7. Low ability to bear Risk
8. Low need for achievement
9. Absence of ambition for the achievement

Social status Dowry Marriage in same caste and child marriage (still existing) Atrocities on Women (Raped, Kicked, Killed, Subdued, humiliated almost daily).

Source: Shettar R.M, 2015 [15]

Ways to Empower Women

- Changes in women's mobility and social interaction
- Changes in women's labour patterns
- Changes in women's access to and control over resources
- Changes in women's control over Decision making
- Providing education
- Self-employment and Self-help group
- Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing
- Other than this society should change the mentality towards the word women
- Encouraging women to develop in their fields they are good at and make a career

Programs for Women Welfare

1. Developmental Corporation of women (DCW)

Women belonging to small farmers, marginal farmers, agricultural laborers and scheduled caste and scheduled tribes categories are eligible to get sheep loan from the corporation on the basis of the unit cost of Rs. 9000 per unit of 20 ewes and so on. The scheme is implemented through the animal husbandry department.

2. Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Park (STEP)

The objective is to provide training to rural women for

increasing their production capacity and income generation in this programme; they give training in the areas of traditional business like agriculture, dairy farming, fisheries, handlooms, khadi etc.

3. Training Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)

The main thrust of the scheme is equipping rural youth with necessary skills and technology to enable them to sack of self-employment. The scheme envisages a stipend for six month or three months for the women.

4. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

The IRDP is a poverty alleviation and Employment oriented programme for the rural poor and is a centrally sponsored schemes funded by the central and state governments on 50:50 basis. The objective of the programme is to assist the families below the poverty line in rural areas and to cross this line by taking up self-employment ventures.

5. Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme (MUNS): Only women entrepreneurs are eligible to barrow loan under this scheme which aims to meet the gap in equity while setting up new industrial projects in small scale sector.

6. Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY): The objective of the scheme is to changing community attitudes towards the girl child and improving her enrolment and retention in school.

7. Swarna Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana Scheme (SGSY): SGSY the emended and merged version of the east while DWCRA, IRDP and TRYSEM was launched in April 1999. It is a holistic credit cum subsidy programme, covering all aspect of self-employment

8. Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY): JRY provides facilities for women through training and employment. The Indira Awas Yojana, art of the JRY, aims at providing homes full of cost the poor people.

9. Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD): It was launched by the government in 1998. It was designed to generate self-employment for 45,000 women in rural and urban areas. The package involves financial assistance and services thorough NGOs in the non-farm sector.

10. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY)

It was launched in 1995 in over 200 blocks of India, for the holistic empowerment of women. IMY is being implemented in 238 blocks and till how 40,000 women's groups have been formed under scheme of these groups were formed in 1999-2000.

11. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

It is national credit fund extends credit facilities stop or and needy women. The risk was extended loans to 20000 self-help groups of women and has a membership of over 300000. It is instrumented in encouraging women to take central of their own development, and has helped build confidence and political awareness.

12. Setting up employment cum-income Generating units (NORAD)

This programme, partially assisted by NORAD aims to improve the lives of poor women by training them in

traditional and non-traditional trades. Basic and advanced computer training, garment making, secretariat practice, embroidery etc. and to ensure their employment in these areas given training.

13. Rural Women's Development and Employment Project

This project was launched in 1998, for strengthening the process of empowerment of women in six statuses through the establishment of self-group.

14. Dairy Information Services Kiosk (DISK)

It is a project which uses information and communication Technology (ICT) in the dairy sector in Gujarat. It is assisting dairy unions in effectively scheduling and organizing the veterinary, artificial insemination, cattle feed and other related services. Usage of ICT goes a long way in empowering men and women.

15. Aamagaon Soochna Kendra (my village information centre)

This project started by Government of Odisha by setting up 73 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) kiosks in rural areas of 12 districts of Odisha. These kiosks are run by women SHGs/Panchayats/NGOs/CBOs youth clubs and managed by the community it valuator paid through user charges collected and managed by the local hosts.

16. Swayamsidha

It is a certainly sponsored scheme implemented under integrated women empowerment programme with the following objectives:

- Establishment
- Improving access to women to micro credit
- Involvement of women in local level planning
- Strengthening institutionalizing the habits in rural women and their control over economic resources.

17. Smile

Savitri Marketing Institution for ladies empowerment is a voluntary organization in Pune. The project has increased literacy level of underprivileged women through the usage of IT. Through Internet, there is greater awareness and exposure and market reach for the product. Internet has also helped them market their various products like soft toys, candles, bags, utility items etc.

Challenges

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which in present in almost all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is the another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

- **Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned. the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.
- **Poverty:** Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.
- **Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.
- **Professional Inequality:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.
- **Morality and Inequality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and china.
- **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

For reducing gender difference in India, we must always supply high level of education to {women to ladies} and increase women authorization. We should additionally provide them chance in active politics & social activities so social integration in Indian society will be created. Government ought to create policies concerning stopping the sex identification & abortions.

Conclusion

The inclusive development of women can be achieved by empowerment of women. Universities can play a greater role in imparting vocational and skill development programmes, even for women who had no access to formal and higher education and thus improve their employability and make them self-dependent. Addressing women's issues also requires recognizing that women are a diverse group, in the roles they play as well as in characteristics such as age, social status, urban or rural orientation and educational attainment. Putting resources into poor women's hands while promoting gender equality in the household and in society results in large development payoffs. Expanding women's opportunities in public works, agriculture, finance, and other sectors accelerates economic growth, helping to mitigate the effects of current and future financial crisis.

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