

“ROLE OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT”

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with importance of gender equality towards achieving the goal of women empowerment. It outlines the gender inequality scenario in India and types of inequalities between men and women. 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. Gender equality is also a precondition for all round development and reducing poverty. Gender inequality holds back the growth of individuals, the development of nations and the evolution of societies to the disadvantage of both men and women. Based on the data analysed, findings of the study show that the role of women across different dimensions of sustainable development is less reflected in the country. The fact that women constitute half the entire population of the country makes empowering them to be an active part of all development initiatives in the country a compelling circumstance. 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. This paper sheds light on importance of gender equality and role of gender equality in women empowerment, gender concern in development and gender main streaming in development. Keywords: - gender equality, empowerment, women participation, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Gender equality means that men and women have equal power and equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development. Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. It includes increasing a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to effect change [1]. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women’s empowerment to ensure that decision making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men’s favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life [2]. There is a bi-directional relationship between economic development and women’s empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development—in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. In one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, continuing discrimination against women can, as Amartya Sen has forcefully argued, hinder development. Empowerment can, in other words, accelerate development [3]. Women also have limited opportunities owing to isolation, exclusion from decision-making processes, low mobility, overwork and violence. Unequal gender relations are generally to the advantage of men, although many current impoverishing mechanisms also work to their detriment. Gender equality seeks human dignity for women and men, recognising that gender roles and identities are flexible and influenced, among other things, by social status and ethnicity. A gender approach takes account of specific risks to men and women and supports strategic partnerships between the sexes. Empowerment of women is nevertheless important as a means of establishing equality between the sexes [4].

2. From Innovation to Women’s Empowerment

How can we harness innovation’s power to empower women and promote greater gender equality? Our research attempts to answer this question by: • Identifying a well-defined pathway that connects innovation to empowerment;

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- Using the pathway to assess eight powerful innovations that changed women's lives in technology use, social norm changes and economic resilience; and
- Identifying the core levers that are essential for innovation to empower women and transform gender relations.

3. Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Women's empowerment is defined as "women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them" (Kabeer 1999). As we articulate it, empowerment is midway in the change processes that benefit women at individual, household, community and broader levels. At the most basic level, innovations can benefit women simply by improving their well-being in terms of health, nutrition, income, life span, etc. (Figure 2). Beyond vital improvements in well-being, changes can result in women's empowerment, where women gain agency and resources to make decisions, build confidence and act in their own interests. Deeper and truly transformative changes reshape societal norms, attitudes and institutional practices. Greater gender equality in markets, political institutions, family systems and social roles provide an ongoing foundation for sustaining women's well-being and empowerment [5].



FROM WELL-BEING TO EMPOWERMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY

4. Gender Inequality in India

According to Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000), gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. As per the report by Tisdell, Roy and Ghose (2001), various international gender inequality indices rank India differently on each of these factors, as well as on a composite basis, and these indices are controversial. Gender inequalities, and its social causes, impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment, and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike. Some argue that some gender equality measures, place men at a disadvantage. However, when India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantage in several important ways. An analysis of gender equality is very essential to understand the level of women empowerment in Indian society.

5. Occupational Inequalities

Women are not allowed to have combat roles in the armed forces. According to a study carried out on this issue, a recommendation was made that female officers be excluded from induction in close combat arms, where chances of physical contact with the enemy are high. It is reported that a permanent commission could not be granted to female officers since they have neither been trained for command nor have they been given the responsibility so far. It shows persistence of disempowerment of women in holding certain occupations in India.

6. Empowering Women

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. The gender equality is need of the hour to prevent the violence against women. The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society [6].

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.

An important route to achieving gender equality is by empowering of women through education, employment and political representation, as well as by ensuring women's access to reproductive health services. Another fundamental step towards the realization of gender equality is to eradicate all forms violence against women [6]. Education is a key area of focus. Although the world is making progress in achieving gender parity in education, girls still make up a higher percentage of out-of-school children than boys. Approximately one quarter of girls in the developing world do not attend school. Typically, families with limited means who cannot afford costs such as school fees, uniforms, and supplies for all of their children will prioritize education for their sons. Families may also rely on girls' labour for household chores, carrying water, and childcare, leaving limited time for schooling. But prioritizing girls' education provides perhaps the single highest return on investment in the developing world. An educated girl is more likely to postpone marriage, raise a smaller family, have healthier children, and send her own children to school [1].

7. Issues to Be Tackled for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

Majority of Women in India are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill-equipped family and are not in a position to propel out themselves of the oppressive and regressive socio-economic conditions. Although lots of things are happening and large amount of resources are being spent in the name of women empowerment in India, the actual situation however, just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. The following are some of the important issues to be tackled for women's empowerment and gender equality in India [7].

- A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality. Women must have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care.
- The programmes for training women in agriculture and other allied occupations should be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.
- Child marriage, which is still prevalent in our society, must be stopped. This is because an early age at marriage of women is an indicator of the low status of women in society and also curtails women's access to education.
- Employment, particularly for cash and in the formal sector, can empower women by providing financial independence. Women should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so as to elevate their status in the society.
- Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women. Education, particularly higher education of women, is a key enabler of demographic change, family welfare, and better health and nutrition of women and their families. Special measures should be taken to create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/ vocation/ technical skills by women.

8. Gender Equality and Women Access to Resources Access to resources is important for economic freedom of women as freedom of movement is linked with their economic independence and also infuses with power and expands agency.

The National Family Health Survey-3 has identified five important variables namely: knowledge of loan programme, get loan, having bank account, higher educational attainment and working outside as a measure of economic independence. Once women have acquired the necessary capabilities, their opportunities for participating in political processes increase. By having access to political and economic opportunities, women have more chance to combat violence [6]. The emphasis on personal security as an aspect of human security is important as it is very often linked with economic power in the form of exploitation and with political power in the form of repression. Capabilities, opportunities and security are therefore necessary not only for poverty reduction but also for peacekeeping. Moreover, capabilities and economic and political opportunities are necessary in a non-violent environment for the advancement of women in order for them to act. The process from innovation to women's empowerment and gender equality is dynamic and complex. That said, there are common approaches, or levers, that can be engaged and brought into the process to provide catalytic change. Based on the analysis of past innovations, our research identifies seven core levers that are instrumental for innovation to catalyse women's empowerment and ultimately gender equality.

9. Conclusion

For economic growth to be really inclusive, women empowerment is of utmost value. It is crucial for achieving sustainable economic development of our country and even beyond. Still a large part of women does not have sufficient autonomy regarding the value choices for their own life. The data also revealed that there is a necessity to look beyond economic resources or material prosperity and into cultural and social influences, which are playing a significant role in shaping the women's autonomy and empowerment. This paper suggests that the government needs to work hard to change the existing position of women and achieve gender equality, which will have a positive spill over effect on the sustainable development of the country. It is observed that women in India have been subjected to various types of discrimination and disabilities towards enjoyment of benefits of development consequent upon disempowerment. Hence the empowerment of women could be possible through attainment of gender equality.

10. References

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