

# **Role of Women in Economic Development**

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## **Abstract**

Women 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. The developmental policies and programs tend not to view women as integral workforce to the economic development process. This is reflected in the higher investments in women's reproductive rather than their productive roles, mainly in population programs. Yet women throughout the developing world engage in economically productive work and earn incomes. They work primarily in agriculture and in the informal sector and increasingly in formal wage employment. However, the earnings are generally low. It has been observed since 1950s that development agencies have responded to the need for poor women to earn incomes by making relatively small investments in income-generating projects. Also, often such projects fail because they are motivated by welfare and not developmental concerns, offering women temporary and part-time employment in traditionally feminine skills such as, knitting and sewing, which have limited markets. To the contrary, over the past twenty years few non- governmental organizations like Self-Employed Women's Association in India have been quite effective in improving women's socio-economic status because they have started with the belief that women are fundamental to the process of economic development.

**Keywords:** Population Programs, Informal Sector, Development Agencies, Income Generating Projects, Non-Governmental Organizations.

## **Introduction**

The persistent of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of “missing women”. It has been estimated that 6 million women are missing every year (World Bank, 2011) 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. For each missing women, 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. The relative deprivation of women and the extent to

which there have been improvements over the last twenty years are apparent in a number of spheres. In access to education in low and moderate income countries, the enrolment rate for girls in secondary school was 34 percent in 2010, while that for boys was 41 percent. Meanwhile, the primary school enrolment has become nearly universal for both boys and girls. In labour market opportunities: women are less likely to work; they earn less than men for similar work and are more likely to be in poverty even when they work. Women spend almost twice as much time on housework, almost five times as much time on child care, and about half as much time on market work as men do. In political representation, women constituted just 19.4 percent of the members of lower and upper houses of parliaments in July 2011. The legal rights of women in many countries still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business or even travel without their husband's consent. There is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment, wherein the latter is defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituent 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, which has forcefully argued and hinder development. Thus, empowerment in other words has to accelerate development. This present research study attempts to understand the reviews, which are the factual evidence on both sides of the empowerment–development relationship. Firstly, it shows that poverty and lack of opportunity breed inequality between men and women, so that when economic development reduces poverty, the condition of women improves on two counts: first, when poverty is reduced, the condition of everyone, including women, improves. Secondly, gender inequality declines as poverty declines, so the condition of women improves more than that of men with development. However, this is not enough to bring about complete equality between men and women.

## **Review of Literature**

A study conducted by Duflo (2000) finds in households, wherein there is a woman receiving an old-age pension compared to women in households where no one receives a pension such that girls have better anthropometric status (weight for height and height for age). This study supports the research conducted by Atkin (2009) on Mexican data to study the effect of mothers' employment in manufacturing on children's height for age. Also, Engle (1993) provides cross-sectional data from Guatemala to show that a higher female budget share is associated with better children's nutritional status (measured by height for age, weight for age and weight for height). A research study conducted by Phipps and Burton (1998) used data from 1992 Expenditure Survey in Canada and focused on married-couple households, where both spouses work full time. The researchers revealed that a higher share of wives' income is correlated with higher expenditures on child care, children's clothing, women's clothing and food. This is supported by a

research study conducted by Kennedy and Peters (1992) in comparing female headed to that of male headed households in Kenya and Malawi and find that in female headed households (typically headed by a widow, who is often the grandmother of the children in the household), a larger share of the budget is spent on food. The research has documented that, better anthropometric outcomes (weight for age and height for age) for Malawi, wherein the researcher explains that smaller expenditure shares on alcohol.

The econometric specification does not control for income, but interestingly female-headed households have better child anthropometric outcomes despite overall lower incomes. Thomas (1990) uses Brazilian survey data collected in 1974 and 1975 to study gender differences in the impact of non-wage income on health and nutrition in Brazil. He finds that maternal income increases family nutrition by four to seven times more than income of men, wherein total calorie intake as well as protein intake is affected more by female than by male income. Also, the child survival is highly positively related to unearned income of mothers and the effect is 20 times larger compared to unearned income of men. Interestingly, maternal income also has a larger effect on two anthropometric outcomes (weight for height and height for age).

A study conducted by Thomas (1994) uses the relative education level of the wife compared to husband as a proxy for bargaining power. Based on data from United States, Brazil and Ghana, the paper documents that mother's education has a larger effect on the nutritional status of girls (measured by height for age) compared to father's education, while the opposite is true for boys. In addition to this recent randomized field experiments have found that transfers to men running small businesses lead to a substantial increase in business profit a few years later, whereas no such effect is found for women.

## **Objectives**

- To review and understand the relation between women empowerment, education, economic development and poverty levels
- To explore the major problems faced by Indian Women

## **Women Empowerment Initiatives**

- The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.
- Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards it has been a marked

that there has been a shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In the recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

- India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. The key aspect among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.
- The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.
- The Government of India attempted to gender sensitize the Budget initially through the Women's Component Plan (by state governments also) and then more intensively with Gender Responsive Budgeting institutionalized through the Gender Budget Statement published every year since 2005-2006 with the Union Budget (in some states as well). This highlights the budgetary allocations for 100 percent women specific programmes (Part A) and those programmes in which at least 30 percent flows to women (Part B) in the annual expenditure budget.
- The women's movement and a wide-spread network of Non-Government Organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insights into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for empowerment of women.

## **Gender Disparity**

- There exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality with regard to status of women in India on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of High level Committee on Status of Women in India, since 2015.
- Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, wherein the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in last few decades. The social stereotyping, violence at the domestic and societal levels, acute wage differentials and discrimination and continuous commoditization in society are some of the other manifestations.

The migration, skewed sex ratio, environmental degradation have added to the women's vulnerability

- The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices.
- Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes / Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and they are in informal, unorganized sector. Also access to education, health and productive resources among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.
- The government has recognized these paradoxes and attempted to address these in policies, legislation and programmes. The development programmes introduced to bring gender equality have produced mixed results. Moreover, the legislative changes have faced resistance in their implementation due to social, cultural and religious mores.

### **Women Impacted by Violence**

- Domestic violence
- Rape victims
- Women in trafficking
- Women suffer under witch-hunting
- Acid attacking

### **Women Impacted by Internal Displacement, Disasters & Migration**

- Either for economic reasons
- Conflict e.g. refugee women
- Women who have been displaced because of SEZ, building of dams etc,
- Women impacted by natural or manmade disasters

### **Women & Labour**

- Domestic labour
- Bonded labour
- Destitute women who are homeless

### **Women in Agriculture**

- Land less women
- Marginal farmers
- Agricultural workers

## **Women & Health**

- Women affected by HIV/ AIDS
- Women suffering from life threatening diseases
- Women with Disabilities
- Elderly Women

## **Women belonging to Ethnic and Socially Vulnerable Communities**

- Women belonging to Ethnic and Religious Minorities (especially Muslims)
- Women belonging to Socially Backward Communities (SC, ST & OBC)

## **Single Women**

- Adolescent Girls
- Widows
- Women whose husbands are missing due to Conflict
- Migrant Women (Economic Migration)
- Divorced Women
- Unmarried Women
- Unwed Mothers

## **Homeless & Destitute Women**

The above categories of women find themselves more vulnerable on account of their unique social, cultural circumstances or because they are victims of violence or abuse. These groups require special interventions to address their needs.

## **Women Empowerment & Economic Development**

The Indian women have spread of their age old shackles of serfdom and male domination. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladder of social advance with proud and dignity. Women in India are now uplifted and granted equal status with men in all of life activities including political, social, domestic and educational, but still there is a need to motivate and encourage women to participation because this proportion is out numbered in comparison with total women population. Women empowerment needs some interventions for making women to be involved in economic development of the country. The development interventions must focus on the real gender needs, including women's income and material assets, which will lead to enhancing women empowerment and decrease poverty. It is to be noted that from this aforementioned intervention women

empowerment will commence and lead to the maximum possible extent. Also, with the implementation of some new interventions the rate of increase in women empowerment will raise relatively in all spheres. The research study by Duflo found positive correlation between women's rights and per capita income in terms of a cost benefit calculus. In accordance with this point of view it was clear that by fostering women empowerment rise in economic development is possible.

## **Women Empowerment & Economic Growth**

Most women in the India rely more on the informal work sector for daily income. It was proved that female participation in counsels, groups and businesses is seen to be have an increase in efficiency. For instance, empowered women can impact a situation monetarily. The research has been conducted by fortune 500 companies, wherein it was found that those with more women's in the category of board directors had significantly higher financial returns, including 53 percent higher returns on equity, 24 percent higher returns on sales and 67 percent higher returns on invested capital (OECD, 2008). This study shows that there was an impact of women in the overall economic benefits of the company. Furthermore, if this gets implemented on a global scale then women in formal sectors can increase the economic growth of a nation.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded from the above discussions that women empowerment plays a major role in the developing countries like India. Moreover, by focusing more on women's education they can sustain their importance in each and every category. Also, organizations involving women in decision making can yield productivity in terms of returns. The policy measures have to embrace women workforces at rural as well as informal sectors across the nation for alleviating poverty levels. This in turn leads to enhance their socio-economic status-quo towards achieving overall economic growth.

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