



## ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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### 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. Education is a reasonably a good indication of development and right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But education is often neglected in societies struggling to meet the needs of their people. Recently education has received a greater priority for the pace of economic development.*

*The present paper aims at explaining the role of women in sustainable economic development, how to enhance the women's participation in economic development, the important legal provisions available for women, women's education and finally presents conclusions based on the study.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Women Empowerment, Education, Legal Provisions and sustainable development.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to highlight the important role of women that she can play in economic development. The status of **women in India** has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. As of 2011, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) were women. However, women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, acid throwing, and dowry killings while young girls are forced into prostitution. According to a global poll conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women and the worst country for women among the G20 countries.

### 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ◆ To study the empowerment of women in different roles for a sustainable economic development.
- ◆ To focus on the enhancement of women's participation in economic development.
- ◆ To exhibit important legal provisions available for women.
- ◆ To present some important statistics for women empowerment.
- ◆ To explain the women's education in India.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is a descriptive research study conducted based on primarily secondary sources of data by collecting information from various journals, articles, newspapers and websites etc.



## **4. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT BY EDUCATION**

Empowering women and girls with education is fundamental to building a sustainable future for this planet. At the January 2012 World Economic Forum, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed the importance of investing in girls' education so that they may be productive in life, contribute to society, and make their own family planning decisions. Research shows that education improves a girl's life by opening her mind to the possibilities of what she may achieve, creating more income-producing work opportunities, improving her health and future children's health, and giving her opportunities for economic independence.

In women's roles as household caretakers, professionals, citizens, family planners, and farmers, education is the key to supporting the sustainable development initiatives.

### **2.1. Women as primary household caretakers:-**

Of the \$1.5 billion people living on \$1 dollar or less a day, over 50% are women. In many parts of the world, women are primarily responsible for care of the household and typically reinvest 90% of their income in their households while men only reinvest 30-40%. With education that leads to greater work opportunities, women may better ensure the welfare of their households. Investing in a woman's education along with her health and profitable activities may have a "multiplier effect on poor economies."

### **2.2. Women as professionals:-**

Some argue that the recent economic crisis and recession occurred due to an economic model created mainly from men's ambitions and perspectives. Some theorize that with women in more decision-making positions, we would be moving more quickly toward sustainability. To be eligible for leadership opportunities that may involve creating sustainability agendas, women need to obtain higher education.

### **2.3. Women as healthy citizens:-**

Women and girls are interested in becoming educated on reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases. In Bolivia, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports a project where women learn to read while also learning about health insurance, reproductive health, and safe motherhood. Several countries, including Chile, India, Nepal, and Colombia, have reproductive health education programs for adolescent girls. In Burkina Faso's program, young mothers between the ages of 19 and 24 are trained as peer educators.

### **2.4. Women as family planners:-**

Family planning education and additional years of general education may have the effect of slowing the world's population growth. Family planning education is essential as the world population is expected to be least 9.2 billion by the year 2050. Voluntary family planning programs in Iran and Thailand have yielded success in reducing the number of unintended pregnancies. Studies also show that an extra year pursuing general education "increases a woman's income by 20 percent, delays marriage, and reduces family size."

### **2.5. Women as farmers:-**

In developing countries, women represent 43% of the agricultural workforce. In regions where women are a significant part of the agricultural workforce, such as sub-Saharan Africa, it is particularly important for women to attain higher education in agricultural technology and science. These women may provide unique and invaluable insight into challenges facing African farmers.

Women play many distinct and important roles in society. Education will allow women to approach any role they choose in a way that supports sustainable development initiatives. If women are empowered with education, their drive and determination might just lead them to one of their greatest roles yet – superhero for the planet.

## **5. ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Enhancing women's participation in development is essential not only for achieving social justice but also for reducing poverty. Worldwide experience shows clearly that supporting a stronger role for women contributes to economic growth, it improves child survival and overall family health, and it reduces fertility, thus helping to slow population growth rates. In short, investing in women is central to sustainable development. And yet, despite these known returns, women still face many barriers in contributing to and benefiting from development. The barriers begin with comparatively low investment in female education and health, they continue with restricted access to services and assets, and they are made worse by legal and regulatory constraints on women's opportunities. As a result, the worldwide progress in development over the last three decades has not translated into proportional gains for women. This paper points to actions that can help to turn around this inequitable situation. Evidence of what works is particularly

strong in five areas: education, health, wage labor, agriculture and natural resource management, and financial services. The paper also suggests a broadening of the women in development approach toward a gender in development strategy that takes into account the relative roles and responsibilities of women and men and recognizes that, of effect long-term change in the conditions of women, the actions and attitudes of men must change.

## **6. IMPORTANT LEGAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN**

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women'. These are broadly classified under two categories.

### **(1) The Crimes Identified Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**

- (i) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)
- (ii) Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373)
- (iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec.302/304-B IPC)
- (iv) Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC)
- (v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)
- (vi) Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)
- (vii) Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age)

### **(2) The Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL)**

Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are:

- (i) The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- (ii) The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
- (iii) The Family Courts Act, 1954
- (iv) The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- (v) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- (vi) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
- (vii) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- (viii) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)

(ix) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

(x) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971

(xi) The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976

(xii) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

(xiii) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

(xiv) The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983

(xv) The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986

(xvi) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

(xvii) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987

(xviii) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

## **7. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Women in India consistently lag behind the men in terms of access to education, health care, jobs etc. Apart from the economic and social inequality, women in India are victims of heinous crimes such as, dowry deaths, rape, molestation and immoral trafficking. As per the latest statistics;

- ★ The female child sex ratio (0-6 years) is 914 per 1000 males
- ★ Rural female literacy rate only 58% while rural male 78%
- ★ Women employment in urban areas is only 13.9% while in rural areas is 29.9%. With the rise in poverty, many women are forced to work in very low end and low paid jobs.
- ★ Employment of women in organized sector is less than 8%.
- ★ Women especially in the child bearing age often deficient in nutrition due to poverty. As a result the number of maternal deaths in India is one of the highest in the world and 87% of all pregnant women in India are anemic.

Unless drastic measures are taken to improve female literacy, create skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet and care for themselves and family, it will be difficult for India to prosper as a nation. Many NGOs are working at the grass root level to empower women to attain economic participation in order to overcome poverty and inequality. You can support this effort by contributing to the following causes to help in the empowerment of marginalized women.

## **8. WOMEN'S EDUCATION**

Women have a much lower literacy rate than men. Far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. In the patriarchal setting of the Indian family, girls have lower status and fewer privileges than

boy children. Conservative cultural attitudes prevents some girls from attending school.

The number of literate women among the female population of India was between 2-6% from the British Raj onwards to the formation of the Republic of India in 1947. Concerted efforts led to improvement from 15.3% in 1961 to 28.5% in 1981. By 2001 literacy for women had exceeded 50% of the overall female population, though these statistics were still very low compared to world standards and even male literacy within India. Recently the Indian government has launched **Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy**. This mission aims to bring down female illiteracy by half of its present level.

The education of women in India plays a significant role in improving living standards in the country. A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside of home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and in reducing the infant mortality rate. Several studies have shown that a lower level of women literacy rates results in higher levels of fertility and infant mortality, poorer nutrition, lower earning potential and the lack of an ability to make decisions within a household. Women's lower educational levels is also shown to adversely affect the health and living conditions of children. A survey that was conducted in India showed results which support the fact that infant mortality rate was inversely related to female literacy rate and educational level. The survey also suggests a correlation between education and economic growth.

In India, it was found that there is a large disparity between female literacy rates in different states. For example, while Kerala actually has a female literacy rate of about 86 percent, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have female literacy rates around 55-60 percent. These values are further correlated with health levels of the Indians, where it was found that Kerala was the state with the lowest infant mortality rate while Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are the states with the lowest life expectancies in India. Furthermore, the disparity of female literacy rates across rural and urban areas is also significant in India. Out of the 24 states in India, 6 of them have female literacy rates of below 60 percent. The rural state Rajasthan has a female literacy rate of less than 12 percent.

In India, higher education is defined as the education of an age group between 18 and 24, and is largely funded by the government. Despite women making up 24-50% of higher education enrollment, there is still a gender imbalance within higher education. Only one third of science students and 7% of engineering students are women. In comparison however, over half the students studying education are women.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

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.

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