EXCLUDING INEQUALITY BY INCLUDING WOMEN: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women form a part of a human resource. Unless this section of the population is given opportunities to prove their capabilities, the development would be imperfect. Women empowerment is a prerequisite to gender equality and development. This paper is descriptive in nature and a modest attempt to understand profoundly the concept of women empowerment, its features, its indicators and various issues related to its measurement.

KEYWORDS: Development, Empowerment, Equality, Women.
INTRODUCTION

While a large part of the world continues to look at women’s issues in terms of paternalism and well-being, the concept of women’s empowerment in the social, political, and economic order as a prerequisite of human development is hardly given the priority that it deserves. Of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. For these women, poverty does not just mean scarcity and want. It means rights denied, opportunities curtailed and voices silenced (CARE-2005). UNDP report (2001) was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered a declaration which almost become a leitmotif for further development measuring and policy planning.

In India, the plight of women is no better than their counterparts in other developing countries. Despite the honour and reverence accorded to them as deities in mythology and personified tribute paid to them as in historical monuments, the ground realities remain opposite in a patriarchal society like Indian, there exists the unfounded belief that man is the bread winner of the family and hence the male child gets the best of limited facilities and resources within the family. The girl child is under constant risk of being aborted through the misuse of modern technology. She is mostly deprived of schooling for sake of taking care of siblings at home. Since she is to be married off soon, investing in her education is a liability. Despite the fact that women are massively involved in almost all sectors of economy, their work and earnings do not count. Their activities as producers of the household are not reflected in National Income Statistics, thus, making their contribution unaccounted for. In an effort to uphold cultural heritage, the past is glamorized and with it, the equality of women and enhancement of their role in development gets inhabited (Sengupta and Singh-2001).
DEFINITION OF “EMPOWERMENT”

To acquire knowledge about empowerment of women, it is of utmost importance to know what actually empowerment means. The World Bank’s Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook defines empowerment in its broadest sense as the “expansion of freedom of choice and action” (Narayan-2002). Empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability (Kabeer-2005).

The World Bank defines empowerment as “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Thus, the World Bank (2001) report confirms societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pays the cost of greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower living standard of their people.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of women refers to giving decision-making power to women in social, economic and political sphere of life. It is a process of making women aware of socio-psycho-cultural and political injustice that is prevailing in the society against women.

United Nations (2001) defines empowerment as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Definition of empowerment relates more directly with power, as “multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations”. It consists of:(1) ‘Power within’, enabling women to articulate their own aspirations and strategies for change; (2)‘Power to’, enabling women
to develop the necessary skills and access the necessary resources to achieve their aspirations; (3) ‘Power with’, enabling women to examine and articulate their collective interests, to organize, to achieve them and to link with other women and men’s organizations for change; and (4) ‘Power over’, changing the underlying inequalities in power and resources that constrain women’s aspirations and their ability to achieve them. These power relations operate in different spheres of life (e.g., economic, social, political) and at different levels (e.g., individual, household, community, market, institutional) (Mayoux-2000).

REVIEW OF POLICY APPROACHES TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

“Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women”(Sen-1999). Cardine Moser (1989) has identified five paradigms towards women’s development in Third World countries. The first paradigm related to welfare approach is based on the traditional view of marking the women’s role in development or the basis of customary gender division of labour. The second paradigm came in existence during 1975-85, when the decade was declared as the ‘Decade of Women’. This approach was aimed at gaining equity and procuring her as active participant in development process. It further aimed at giving equal opportunities to women even by creating positive discrimination or reservation. The third paradigm was concerned with anti poverty, directed at poor women to ensure and increase their productivity. This is still being followed under the assumption that women’s problems arise out of under-development. In this context, the approach of rural development is increasingly confronting itself to the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHG’s), in stabilising and linking with viable socioeconomic activities for sustainable livelihood. This is seen as the only solution of poverty eradication, equity and development of women. The fourth paradigm is related with efficiency which depends on the belief that
policies of economic stabilisation and adjustment rely on women’s economic contribution to development and their economic participation is seen as a mechanism to achieve equity. The fifth paradigm is empowerment model, which envisages greater (Moser-1989).

The welfare approach introduced in the 1950’s and followed through the 1960’s may be considered the earliest policy approach concerned with women in developing countries (Moser 1993). Here, women are seen as passive recipients of development, rather than participants in the development process. The reproductive role of women is recognised and policy seeks to meet practical gender needs through that role by top-down handouts of food aid, measures against malnutrition, and family planning. As such it did not include women in participatory planning processes.

However by 1970, the limitations and the critique of the welfare approach became obvious and resulted in the development of a number of alternative approaches based on equity, poverty alleviation, efficiency, and empowerment. These approaches are not entirely mutually exclusive and have been categorised, in general as the women in development (WID) approach.

The original WID approach was the equity approach, introduced during the 1976-‘85 UN Women’s Decade. Its purpose is to gain equity for women in the development process. Women are seen as active participants in development. It seeks to meet strategic gender needs through direct state intervention giving political and economic autonomy to women, and thus reducing inequality with men. It acknowledges that they must be ‘brought into’ the development process through access to employment and the market place. However, equity programmes encountered problems from the outset. The lack of a single unified indicator of social status and of baseline information about women’s economic, social, and political status meant that there were no standards against which ‘success’ could be
measured. Politically the majority of development agencies were hostile to the programmes because of their intention to meet not only practical gender needs but also strategic gender needs whose very success depended on an implicit redistribution of power.

The **anti-poverty approach**, the second WID approach, the ‘toned down’ version of equity was also introduced in the 1970’s. This approach to women focuses mainly on their productive role, on the basis that poverty alleviation and the promotion of balanced economic growth require the increased productivity of women in low-income households. It aims to increase the employment and income-generating options of poor women through better access to productive resources. It was soon realised, however, that though the approach might meet practised gender needs by augmenting their income, unless employment leads to greater autonomy, it would not meet strategic gender needs. Moreover, the income-generating programmes implemented under the assumption that women have free time, often succeed only by extending their working day and increasing their burden.

The purpose of the **efficiency approach** – the now predominant WID approach – is to ensure that development is made efficient and effective through women’s economic contribution. Women’s participation is equated with equity for women. It seeks to meet practical gender needs. Experience illustrates the fact that the efficiency approach only meets practical gender needs at the cost of longer working hours and increased unpaid work. In most cases this approach failed to reach any strategic gender needs (Anand-2002).

The **empowerment approach** is the most recent and is aimed at empowering women through greater self-reliance and internal strength. It seeks to meet strategic gender needs indirectly through bottom-up mobilisation around practical gender needs. When the first
welfare approach recognises only the reproductive role of women and utilises women’s organization as a top-down means of delivering services, the empowerment approach recognises the triple role of women and seeks through bottom-up women’s organisations to raise women’s consciousness to challenge their subordination. A diverse range of women’s organization including Self-Help Groups (SHGs) developed in this context conveying a multitude of issues and purposes (Ibid).

**DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES TO WOMEN DEVELOPMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Project Goal</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Type of Development Interventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concept of the problem</td>
<td>Concept of the Solution</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Welfare</strong></td>
<td>Women’s Poverty, Women’s special needs, Women as a vulnerable group, women’s lower socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Provision of support services of health, nutrition, child care</td>
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<td>Build Maternity clinic, health clinics, immunization, health education, nutrition education</td>
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<td><strong>Economic Self-Reliance</strong></td>
<td>Women as under employed, dependent, lacking in productive skills</td>
<td>Promote self-reliance and interdependence provide productive skills, encourages women’s productive enterprises</td>
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<td>Income generating projects for women, women’s clubs, soap making, school uniform making etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>Women as previously overlooked resource in development planning, women as under develop human capital</td>
<td>Identify actual productive roles of women, support women with skills training and improved technology, invest in previous overlooked resource</td>
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<td>Integration of women in development planning, maintaining of women’s development extension advice for women farmers, appropriate technology for women’s access to factors of production</td>
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<td><strong>Equality</strong></td>
<td>Structure of inequality, discrimination against women in schooling, credit access to hand</td>
<td>Equality of opportunity for women in schooling, access to factors of production</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Affirmative action to promote equal opportunity, revise development planning so that women are equal partners and beneficiaries in</td>
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Dimensions of Women Empowerment

The expansion in the range of potential choices available to women includes three inter-related dimensions that are inseparable in determining the meaning of an indicator and hence its validity as a measure of empowerment. These dimensions are (1) **Resources**: The pre-condition necessary for women to be able to exercise choice; women must have access and future claims to material, human and social resources; (2) **Agency**: The process of decision-making, including negotiation, deception and manipulation that permit women to define their goals and act upon them; (3) **Achievements**: The well-being outcomes that women experience as a result of access to resources and agency (Umashankar-2006).

Chen and Mahmud (1995) distinguish different dimensions of empowerment –material, cognitive, perceptual and relational – on the basis of positive change, the consequence of which is women’s improved fallback position and greater bargaining power:

- **Material empowerment** occurs through expansion in the material resource base of women.
- **Cognitive empowerment** occurs from women’s recognition of their own abilities and skills, indicated by greater self esteem and confidence.

Source: UNICEF, based on Moser in ICECD, Making Development Gender sensitive, a Guide for Trainer, Allahabad, ICECD.
• **Perceptual empowerment** occurs through changes in how others perceive them, indicated by increased social prestige and value.

• **Relational empowerment** takes place through changes in gender relations within the family and in the broader society, indicated by gender reduction in inequality in relationships.

**CHANGES REQUIRED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Improvement in the physical, economic, political or social well-being of women will not be sustained unless:

• **Individuals change**: Poor women become actors for change, able to analyze their own lives, make their own decisions and take their own actions. Women (and men) gain ability to act by building awareness, skills, knowledge, confidence and experience.

• **Structures change**: Women and men, individually and collectively, challenge the routines, conventions, laws, family forms, kinship structures and taken-for-granted behaviours that shape their lives – the accepted forms of power and how these are perpetuated.

• **Relations change**: Women and men form new relations with other social actors, form coalitions and develop mutual support in order to negotiate, be agents of change, alter structures and so realize rights, dignity and livelihood security (CARE-2005).

**INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The interpretation of women empowerment and its measurement also varies across different studies. Most researchers construct an index/indicator of women empowerment. (Ackerly-1995) creates an indicator, “**Accounting Knowledge**”, to measure the probability
that the changes associated with empowerment intervene. Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) build an index of Managerial Control in order to classify the borrowers into five categories ranging from no control (no knowledge of the use of the loan or no contribution in terms of labour to the financed activity) to full control of the use of the loans (full control over the entire productive process, including marketing).

**BEIJING CONFERENCE 1995 INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE.**

Beijing conference 1995 had identified certain quantitative and qualitative indicators of women empowerment. These are:

**QUALITATIVE INDICATORS**

1. Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
3. Increase and decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care;
4. Increase on decrease of workloads in new programmes;
5. Change in roles and responsibility in family & community;
6. Visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
7. Responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
8. Visible changes in women's participation level attending meeting, participating and demanding participation;
9. Increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
10. Increase access to and ability to gather information;

11. Formation of women collectives;

12. Positive changes in social attitudes;

13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;

14. A Woman's decision-making over her work and income.

**QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS**

1. Demographic trends
   - Maternal mortality rate
   - Fertility rate
   - Sex ratio
   - Life expectancy at birth
   - Average age of marriage

2. Number of women participating in different development programmes.

3. Greater access and control over community resources/government schemes-crèche, credit cooperative, non formal education.

4. Visible change in physical health status and nutritional level.

5. Change in literacy and enrolment levels.

6. Participation levels of women in political process monitorable targets for the Tenth Plan and beyond had certain key issues related to gender.
   - All children in school by 2003; all children to complete five years of schooling by 2007.
   - Reduction of gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by at least 50% by 2007.
   - Reduction of IMR to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and 28 by 2012.
• Reduction of maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 onto to by 2012.

In another study, Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (1996) investigate the change in women empowerment with the help of an ethnographic study and quantitative survey. The analysis uses 1,300 women sample data to measure the effects of Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee. They create an empowerment indicator build on the following eight criterions: mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, large purchases, involvement in major household decisions, and relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, participation in public protests and political campaigns.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment aims at enabling women to realise their identities, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives. Thus, it can be analysed that indicators like access to information; inclusion and participation; accountability; and local organisational capacity are some requisite for the empowerment of women. A holistic approach dealing with all the dimensions is required to empower women in real sense. At the same time Women cannot be inactive recipients of measures to improve their status, but active initiators of change. As Amartya Sen underlines it, beyond the rights concerning their well being it is crucial to confer women a role of agent in change.

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