



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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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. Does this imply that pushing just one of these two levers would set a virtuous circle in motion? This paper reviews the literature on both sides of the empowerment-development nexus, and argues that the inter-relationships are probably too weak to be self-sustaining, and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.*

**Keywords:** *Women, Development, Economic.*

### **Introduction**

Women play a critical role in the family which is the basic unit of society. Family is a strong force for social cohesion and integration and as such should be strengthened. The inadequate support to women and insufficient protection to their respective families affect society as a whole and undermines efforts to achieve gender equality. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist and the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of family members must be respected. Women's social and economic contributions to the welfare of the family and the social significance of maternity and paternity continue to be inadequately addressed. Motherhood and fatherhood and the role of parent and legal guardians in the family and in the upbringing of children and the importance of all family members to the family's well-being is also acknowledged and must not be a basis for discrimination. Women also continue to bear a disproportionate share of the household responsibilities and the care of children, the sick and the elderly. In order to achieve full partnership, both in public and private spheres, both women and men must be enabled to reconcile and share equally work responsibilities and family responsibilities.

Strong national machineries for the advancement of women and promotion of gender equality require political commitment at the highest level. Reforms to meet the challenges of the changing world are essential to ensure women's equal access to institutions and organizations. Institutional and conceptual changes are a strategic and important aspect of creating an enabling environment for the implementation of policies and programmes for the advancement of women.

Programme support to enhance women's opportunities, potentials and activities need to have a dual focus: one the one hand, programmes aimed at meeting the basic as well as the specific needs of women for capacity building, organizational development and empowerment; and on the other, gender mainstreaming in all programme formulation and implementation activities. It is particularly important to expand into new areas of programming to advance gender equality in response to current challenges.

Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society. There is therefore need to take into account and to address their concerns in all policy making and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development. Effective and coordinated plans and programmes for the full implementation of women-oriented policies require a clear knowledge on the situation of women and girls, a clear research-based knowledge and data disaggregated by sex, short and long-term time-bound targets and measurable goals and follow-up mechanisms to assess progress. Efforts are needed to ensure capacity building for all the actors involved in the achievement of these goals. Efforts are also needed at the national level to increase transparency and accountability.

The realization of the goals of gender equality needs to be supported by the allocation of necessary human and financial resources for specific and targeted activities to ensure gender equality at the local, national, regional and international level as well as by enhanced and increased international cooperation. The explicit attention to these goals in budgetary processes at the national, regional and international level is essential. '

Recognizing the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women in many countries, particularly in developing countries, it is essential to continue from a gender perspective to review, modify and implement integrated macro-economic



and social policies and programmes to ensure universal and equitable access to social services, in particular to education, and affordable quality health care services and equal access to and control over economic resources.

### **Gender Equality and Development**

Gender equality is a constituent of development as well as an instrument of development. No country can be deemed developed if half of its population is severely disadvantaged in terms of basic needs, livelihood options, access to knowledge, and political voice. It is an instrument of development because without gender equality other goals of development will also be difficult to achieve, namely the goals of poverty alleviation, economic growth, environmental sustainability etc.

A natural corollary of ensuring gender equality is the elimination of gender discrimination. Inequalities between girls and boys in access to schooling or adequate health care prove a very serious disadvantage to women and girls and limit their capacity to participate in the benefits of development.

While the gender sensitization of policies, programmes and schemes go a long way in empowering women, it is human development indicators, which reflect the ultimate and true empowerment of women in a country.

Unfortunately, the basic parameters of health (sex ratio, IMR, MMR, immunization levels, morbidity, mortality, anaemia etc.), nutrition (malnutrition, underweight, anaemia etc.), education, (illiteracy, poor enrolment, drop out etc) employment and training (unorganised, unpaid sectors, discrimination in wages, poor skill development, drudgery areas of occupations such as agriculture and construction) reflect the continuing dismal status of women in various parts of the world.

### **Rural India: An Overview**

India is a land of villages and more than 65 percent of population is living in the rural areas. The development of India depends on the development of rural masses. It was for this reason that Gandhiji laid the greatest emphasis on the development of villages in India-culturally, economically as well as politically. He said, "U" the villages perish, India will perish too" Gandhiji believed that India's progress would remain rather marginal or cosmetic unless it reaches and shows up in the remotest comers of the nation's vast countryside or until the villages become the main repository of progress and power. Therefore, rural development has been high on India's agenda since independence.

Economic empowerment has changed the lives of many poor people including the women, by providing them economic gain on an on-going and sustained basis. Without economic empowerment, social empowerment has little relevance. Entrepreneurship is suitable for economic empowerment of rural women. A self-employed woman is getting better status and it enables her to take pan in decision making in the family affairs. Participation of women in the decision making process could be enhanced many fold and progress attained in shorter time. Women's economic empowerment is absolutely essential for raising their status in the society. Women have a good combination of entrepreneurial spirit, ambition, discipline and restrains.

Development of women entrepreneurship enables men to understand and appreciate Women's abilities. India is mainly an agricultural country and a very large number of people are engaged in agricultural occupation, The rural sector in India also plays a predominant role in the development of the economy. The role of 'village' and 'cottage' industries in rural development in considered as vital as these are the backbone of the Indian rural economy. In the rural area, rural women constitute nearly 48 percent of the country's population. They have been neglected from enjoying even their fundamental rights till recent times.

The World Bank in its Annual report observed that 35 percent of Indian households below the poverty line are headed by women, and in most cases, are thus, dependent exclusively on female income. Since Independence, the Government has been introducing several schemes for their all round development, but the results are not up to the mark.

Education provides women with the knowledge and skills to contribute to and benefit from development efforts, especially in areas of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and environment. If the women both in rural and urban areas are illiterates, no advancement in the status and conditions of women is to be claimed. If education is given to rural women, it would more surely pass on to the next generation.

Rural women play a significant role in the family, which is the basic unit of society. As a companion and wife to her husband, a mother to her children, she holds an emotional and social existence. It is the woman who is indirectly responsible for the nation's progress and development.



Rural women play a vital role in farm and 'home'. She contributes substantially in the physical aspect of farming, live-stock management, post harvest and allied activities. Her direct and indirect contribution at the farm and home level along with livestock management operations has not only helped to save but has also led to increase in family income.

She performs various farm, livestock, post harvest and allied activities and possesses skills and indigenous knowledge in these areas. This is in spite of her being the socially suppressed, educationally at a disadvantageous position and having a little say in the decision making process due to lack of independent income source in hand. Hence, it becomes imperative to empower them technically so as to cope with the changing times and productively use her free time and existing skills for setting and sustaining enterprises. This will not only generate income for the family but also improve the decision making capabilities of the rural women leading to overall empowerment.

The Indian economy needs to generate a large number of jobs in the decentralized rural non farm sector, comprising to small, tiny, cottage, village industries in order to arrest the rising unemployment and urban migration in the country.

The rural economy in recent years has been showing clear positive signs for the micro enterprise opportunities especially for women. The prospects of micro entrepreneurship are very high in a few sub sectors such as trade, transport, construction and services.

### Discussion

The persistence of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women". The term was coined by Amartya Sen in a now classic article in the *New York Review of Books* (Sen, 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men, as they do in Sub Saharan Africa. Today, it is estimated that 6 million women are missing every year (World Development Report, 2012) of these, 23 percent are never born, 10 percent are missing in early childhood, 21 percent in the reproductive years, and 38 percent above the age of 60. Stark as the excess mortality is, it still does not capture the fact that throughout their lives, even before birth, women in developing countries are treated differently than their brothers, lagging behind men in many domains. For each missing woman, 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.

Table: Some indicators of the welfare of men and women

	1990		2010	
	Boys/men	Girls/Women	Boys/men	Girls/Women
Primary enrolment rate	81	67	107	100
Secondary enrolment rate	30	22	41	34
Labor force participation	82%	50%	78%	52%
Gender ratio at birth	1.06	1	1.09	1
Life expectancy	51	54	56	59

### Sources

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Table summarizes some indicators of the relative position of women and men circa 1990 and circa 2009 in the county. Both the relative deprivation of women, and the extent to which there have been improvements over the last 20 years are apparent in a number of spheres. In access to education, the enrolment rate for girls in secondary school was 34% in 2010, while that for boys was 41%. 20 years before, the rates were respectively 22% and 30%. Meanwhile, primary school enrolment has become nearly universal for both boys and girls. In labor 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 legal rights: women in India still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their husband's consent.



### Conclusion

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. Policy makers and social scientists have tended to focus on one or the other of these two relationships. Those focusing on the first have argued that gender equality improves when poverty declines. They argue that policymakers should therefore focus on creating the conditions for economic growth and prosperity, while seeking, of course, to maintain a level playing field for both genders, but without adopting specific strategies targeted at improving the condition of women.

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