

Empowering Women: The Key to Economic Development

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ABSTRACT:

Economic development and women empowerment are interconnected: Despite being a part of our society, women have fewer rights than men. It is gender discrimination that prevents women from eliminating poverty and advancing in their lives. Sometimes, their contributions to the economy are ignored and underestimated. They are not seen as integral to economic development policies and programs. It is only by "empowering" women that we can reduce the gap between men and women and create equal playing fields between both sexes. UNDP focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment because they are embedded in the Millennium Development Goals and a way to achieve sustainable development. The empowerment of women also involves understanding their rights, having self-confidence, and having control of their lives. If women are empowered they can change their economic status as well as the status of society. Economic development and women's empowerment are bidirectional, defined as improving women's access to development's components - especially health, job opportunities, education, equal rights, and political participation. There are many aspects of empowerment, such as economic, social, political, and personal, that runs parallel to one another. A sustainable route of growth can be attained by providing equal opportunity to men and women in all aspects of life, including decision-making. Thus Women's conditions should be improved for the welfare of society. Hence this paper examines the relationship between women's empowerment and economic progress.

Keywords: Gender equality, Women Empowerment, Economic development, Discrimination, UNDP.

INTRODUCTION:

The seeds for the women's empowerment movement were sown in North America in the nineteenth century. This movement laid the foundation for women's rights. Apart from mobilizing women around the world, it has been the source of many reform movements. In India, many reformers such as Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde have criticized discrimination and misconduct against women. Over time, women began to enjoy various social and political rights. Women began to question on issues such as restricting women to traditional tasks, not giving them decision-making power, and lack of political and economic freedom. Due to patriarchal rules and customs their scope was limited and they were prevented from participating freely in economic activities.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (1976), and The International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (1966) are widely approved instrument's that recognize the need for gender equality. In addition, the

Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of the All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Regional Human Rights conventions, and International Labour organization also urge the need for women empowerment.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is considered as an important linkage with gender equality, poverty eradication, and inclusive growth. The Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 recognizes WEE as a precondition for gender equality and sustainable development. To achieve these goals the UN Secretary General established a High-Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment in 2017. In achieving many development goals and bringing about positive social change, empowering women and improving women's status can play an important role.

Constitution and Women Empowerment:

The concept of gender equality is explicitly mentioned in our Constitution. The Constitution recognizes the equality of women in fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. By giving Right to equality, Women's universal suffrage and various special laws relating to women protection, India has made it clear that all are equal in the eyes of the Constitution. Furthermore, several initiatives taken by the Indian government to empower women are also reflected in the various programs, five-year plans and laws. India has enacted a number of laws to combat gender-based violence over the past two decades. Nirbhaya Act, POCSO Act and POSH Acts were enacted to prevent sexual assaults on women and children. However, despite these laws, the prevalence of gender inequality and gender-based violence still continues to persist. Many researchers have found that Women's empowerment can have a positive impact on national GDP growth and economic activity. Hence our study concentrates on Women empowerment and Economic development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To know the relation between women empowerment and economic development.
2. To know the Constitutional safeguards for women.
3. To understand the relation between Education and Women empowerment.
4. To study the relation between Women empowerment and Poverty.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Dr. Meenakshi Lohani & Prof. Loai Aburaida (2017) finds that gender equality is not a socio-cultural issue, indeed it is deeply rooted in economic and environmental spheres. From a gender perspective, it is necessary to consider the perceptions, needs and priorities of both women and men. Gender equality and women empowerment is a way to achieve sustainable development. **Marian Sohail** (2014) findings based on an open ended questionnaire reveals that Male dominated society is not willing to give freedom to women. To empower, it is essential for women to raise their voice. The respondents of the study agreed that women should be empowered in terms of education, health and decision making. The research findings also reveal that women's education is a key

instrument for the development of the economy. **Shanti. S, A.V.N. Murty** 2019 findings reveal the correlation between high educational qualifications and women empowerment. Women with higher education are more empowered and getting more job opportunities as compared to women with low education. Thus the findings proved that women's education is a key to women empowerment. **Bayes et.al.** (1998) findings reveal that the initiatives of several NGO in rural Bangladesh are empowering women not only fulfilling their economic needs but also helping them to break the chains of poverty trap. Many researchers found that the impact of women's empowerment on income, income poverty, and multidimensional poverty has an influential effect. Achieving women's empowerment seems to have reduced income inequalities and reduced social discrimination. In these way women empowerment can be considered as contributing to economic development.

METHODOLOGY:

The Present study uses secondary data to analyze the research problem. The data were collected from online journals, books and government official websites.

RESULT & DISCUSSION:

Indian women face many inequalities in society due to discriminatory practices such as child marriage, dowry, honor killing, and gender-based sexual selection. Their predominance in the socio-economic and political spheres is limited due to the patriarchal society. A gendered biased society also questions the existence of women. As a result of gender discrimination a significant decline in the sex ratio is seen in some states which poses a serious of social evils such as prostitution, abduction of girls and child marriages, etc. There are several reasons which confine women's participation in developmental activities. Women are always seen as second citizens in our society. They are not allowed to make decisions and mostly their services are recognized as unpaid work. All these are further degrading their status. According to Babasaheb Ambedkar, the progress of a country is determined by the status of its women. Therefore, women's empowerment is not just a matter of women; it is a matter of countries' holistic development.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Women's empowerment is closely linked to women's employment. If women have financial independence their decisions will have value. But many women in our country are doing low paid or unpaid work in unorganized sectors. Rural and urban work opportunities for women are becoming increasingly informal and casualized. The presence of weak or nonexistent social safety nets indicates that women are becoming more vulnerable. That is why there has been a long-running debate on women's unpaid work on national level platforms.

According to the 2011 census, only 25 percent of the women are in the workforce. Despite being almost half the population, women make up only a third of India's workforce. Around 60% of women in India are employed in the agriculture sector, which is expected to suffer from automation-

induced job losses. A steady decline in Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) was noticed in the last ten years. The participation of Muslim women in labour force is very low. Social norms, low wages, family responsibilities, lack of flexible working hours, gender bias, safety at working places are the prominent reasons for low female participation in the workforce.

Women's absence from the productive workforce poses a serious threat to economic development. As a result, not only are they depriving themselves of financial freedom, but they are limiting their decision-making ability as well. Hence Women need better opportunities to participate in the productive workforce. Through education, technical skills, and financial support, their employment prospects will increase.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION:

There is a direct and indirect relationship between gender, education, and the labour market. There is a direct correlation between educational level and employability and wages. Women with higher education will have equal opportunities and better social status. Educated women further improve the lives of poor households and assist them in getting out of poverty. But in India women are deprived of education for centuries. According to the 2011 Census female literacy rate is around 65.46 which is very low compared to their male counterparts. The low literacy levels limit their active participation in income generating activities, which in turn push their families into severe poverty.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY:

The most effective way to reduce poverty is to invest in the education of girls. Women play a crucial role in both the economic development and social transformation, as well as in the family. If women are economically empowered, they spend their incomes on children's education, health and asset creation. An empowered woman empowers the family. In addition to improving the living standards of households, empowering women has a positive effect on poverty reduction. Poverty alleviation is the responsibility of governments. Poverty alleviation programs have been carried out in a number of ways since independence. But they did not give the expected results, because they ignored the role of women in poverty alleviation. Now the governments recognized the role of Women SHGs in reducing poverty. By providing credit facilities, improving the skills and generating employability to women will reduce poverty.

CONCLUSION:

Empowering women is critical for economic development. Empowered women improve the health and social development of families, societies and countries. When women are educated and empowered, they utilize their full potential by contributing their skills to the workforce and raising family incomes. They can also support sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity in general. Enhancing women's political, social, economic and health standing is a highly important

end in itself.

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