

## Rural Women Empowerment in India

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**Abstract:** A Rural woman is the nucleus of the family, particularly, in rural India. She not only collects water, fuelwood, fodder and food but also plays a significant role in preserving the culture, grooming the children and shaping their destiny. Therefore, our Founder, Late Dr. Manibhai Desai always emphasized that although women represent only 50% of the total population, they contribute 75% to the development of our society while men contribute only 25%. Unfortunately, in spite of their laudable and vulnerable roles, which cannot be substituted by machine or men, women have been neglected since generations. This is happening inspite of a rural woman being recognized by our ancient saints and culture as not merely a mother but as a superior scholarly Institution. It is said in Manu Samhita (Chapter II, Para 145) *Upadhyayan-dasacarya acarryanam satam pita; Sahasram tu pitnmata gauraveratiricyate*. "A Guru who teaches Veda is 10 times superior to an ordinary teacher and the father is 100 times more than a teacher, but the Mother is 1000 times more superior than the father".

**Key Words:** rural, women, empowerment, social, education, poverty.

### INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates women in the family, class, caste, religion, or society, can be changed. The economic empowerment approach has relied on improving women's control over economic resources and strengthening women's economic security. The results also suggest that policies to rise women's age at marriage, enhance their educations and open greater employment opportunities will also help to empower them, at least in some respects. (Adick (1995) Our goal is to cause policy, institutional and individual change that will improve the lives of women and girls everywhere.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Women's empowerment is an important agenda in the development efforts. There has been significant shift in approach of the district administration towards the development of women, especially the poor & the illiterate. When you train a woman, you help the entire family, the village and the nation. The current paper focuses on women's empowerment in the domestic sphere—that is, their freedom from control by other family members and ability to effect desired outcomes within the house hold.

### EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources - material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money - and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain 'power'. According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power". The process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives and c) exercise this control without infringing on the rights of others and d) support the empowerment of others in the community

### EDUCATION OF WOMEN

Education to women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position the society. Education also brings about reduction in inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family. In order to encourage education of women at all levels and to dilute gender bias in the provision and acquaintance of education, schools, colleges and even universities were established exclusively for women in the State. To bring more girl children, especially from marginalized BPL families, into the main stream of education, Government has been providing a

package of concessions in the form of free supply of books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for hostilities, mid-day meals, scholarships, free by-cycles and so on. (Awasthi, O. N. (1993) As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate.

### **Health and well-being**

**Health and well-being** is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organization, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The complexity of the social and cultural issues, combined with the stigma and fear of disclosure lead to a situation where only a small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse, wife battering and gun related violence are ever reported, making accurate data extremely difficult to obtain.

### **MAJOR HANDICAPS IN OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AND SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME**

#### **1. Limited access to resources (Land):**

Access to assets is the single most urgent need for the upliftment of women in general and farm women in particular. Though the Indian legislation permits equal right of man & women in property yet the condition in actual sense is not so. Rural women still do not have ownership on land and the pattas are allotted in the name of their husband. (Gopalan, S., 1992) Due to this the cannot take independent decision on various agricultural aspects. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to promote women access to resources. For promoting women's access to land, the measures can be-

- distribution of land to the landless women should also be included in the existing Govt.,
- Policies on distribution of joint pattas to husband & wife and
- Short term operational ownership of land female farmers while giving land on leasing may be arranged.

#### **2. Limited access to input & credit:**

Though women make substantial contributors to agriculture development, their access to the most crucial input credit is limited. Since they are not land owners, the credit flow generally goes in the name of male members (i.e. owners). For promoting women's access to farm input & credit, following may be taken:

- Credit flow to rural women could be channeled through credit & thrift societies.
- Voluntary agencies in each district may be identified which could help in developing women organizations.
- Credit organizations should simplify the procedures & modalities to suit the educational level of rural women & also organize credit camps in village exclusively for women.
- Farm women should also be recipient of credit for which possession of assets may not be insisted upon.
- Existing loaning policies of NABARD need orientation towards women credit eligibility by granting them the status of a producer.

#### **3. Inadequate technical competency:**

Though women are involved in almost all agricultural operations, yet, they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world. This has compelled them to follow the age old practices which in turn result in poor work efficiency and drudgery. Training is an important component of HRD which enhances knowledge, skill and attitude. (Hernader , 1993) For building technical competency among farm women, specialized need based and skill oriented training should be organized preferably at village level. Some of the priority areas in which women need **training** are:

- Conservation and management of natural resources
- IPM and INM
- Renewable energy sources
- Seed production technology
- Use of fertilizer
- Post-harvest management

#### **For effective training programmes, following points should be considered.**

- i) Extension agencies should pursue the family approach to training
- ii) Training should be organized at appropriate time specially the pre- seasonal training.
- iii) There should be proper followed-up of the programmes and there should be synchronization in time between knowledge and skill transfer and the supply credit and other inputs needed to apply the knowledge.

iv) During training, the training institute should identify the active participants and intensive training should be imparted to them so that they can be used as a Opara-extension workers for dissemination of technical information.

#### **4. Poor participation in decision making :**

Generally, decision regarding the activities requiring technical competency and money related matters were taken by male members. Since knowledge and economic independence are the parameters of women empowerment enhancing the technical knowledge, skills and building greater involvement in various farm activities.

#### **5. Poor existing Research and Extension System No or Poor gender consideration:**

Though several technological breakthrough have been observed in the recent past the technologies by the researchers are not tailored to the specific needs of the farm women. With the result, most of the agricultural operations are performed manually and in an unskilled manner which results into greater drudgery on the part of farm women. In order to cater to the technological needs of the farm women, there is need to re-orient the entire research system for which following measures may be taken. In order to make scientific information in agriculture and skill areas more useful, it should be tested and refined keeping in view the different farming situations in socio-cultural milieu. (Mishra .S.P., 1996) It would lead to women specific technologies. Some of the tasks and operations which women are specifically involved and which are drudgery prone include transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing etc. Therefore, these require special attention of the farm scientist for evolving relevant technologies or modifying the existing ones. The design, development and testing of agricultural implements and machinery should be undertaken with the active participation of rural women. In this regard with local artisans will be helpful. In essence machinery should be a blessing rather than become a curse. While evolving agricultural technologies; indigenous practices used by women should be paid due attention for blending with the frontier ones for greater adoption.

#### **6. Limited exposure to mass media :**

The transfer of technology approach which mainly includes mass media are also not paying due attention towards dissemination of adequate and timely agricultural information to the farm women.

#### **WOMEN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

Against the background of the patriarchal system of society, the women need special attention to ensure their development and participation in the decision

making process at home, in the community and governance. With the objective of bringing about economic and social development of women and improving their status in the community the programme for Women Development was being implemented by CSR in and around Tiruchendur of Tuticorin district and Thovalai blocks of Kanyakumari District.

#### **The various activities planned and carried out are:**

- Formation and Training of Self Help Groups
- Group Development
- Capacity Building
- Income Generation Activities
- Credit and Savings Mobilisation
- Establishment of linkages

These activities had made impressive impacts in empowering women and improving their economic and social status in their families and communities. The thrust of the programme is organising women and federating them at different level to enhance their social status. Due to the entrepreneur development skills promoted, the women took up various income generating activities as individuals and as a group such as mat weaving, dairy farms, palm crystal candy making, flour rice, fancy shops, petty shops, soap manufacturing, textile business and paper cup. So far 58 groups are involved in income generating activities and 3173 individuals have taken up income generating programmes. (Donald F. Kuratko, Richard M. Hodgetts., 1997) The federation of women SHGs called 'Sangamam' was formed by the members themselves based on their own experience and the exposure they received. It decided to start a supermarket and a building was constructed. As a share of Rs.10,000 was collected from each SHGs by the federation. All the SHG members buy the provisionary items from their own Sangamam store and steps are taken to distribute the items at their door steps through vans. The federation has assumed maximum responsibilities and there is ample scope that soon it will become fully self sustaining entity.

#### **Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme**

Tejaswini means radiance or one who gives light, and reflects the objective of the project in moving women to a higher level through their collective efforts and mutual assistance. (Bhatia Anju (2000) This would up-scale and further develops the concepts tested in the Maharashtra Rural Credit Programme, which IFAD supported from 1994 to 2002.

### Programme Target Group

The programme will use lessons drawn from previous IFAD implementation experience, which suggests targeting in terms of poverty should be flexible and responsive to local conditions. In Maharashtra the programme would support existing groups and groups that will be formed by other programmes (in particular TSP, SCP). In Madhya Pradesh (MP) it is planned that at least 10% of groups being formed of women from the poorest households defined in terms of relying on casual labour and without any agricultural land. Programme Area. In supporting the overall development of MAVIM, the programme will cover all 33 rural districts of Maharashtra, and about 10,000 villages out of the total of 43,000. However the activities to be funded by the programme will tend to concentrate on the 16 tribal districts and other backward areas. The programme would be implemented in six districts of MP. (Lalita .N, 2005) These include the three districts in the tribal-dominated south-east of the state (Balaghat, Dindori, Mandla) and three other districts (Panna, Chhattarpur and Tikangarh) in the north-east of the state. Although these districts are not as poor, gender indicators show women are worse off.

### CONCLUSION

Though they make half of the world population, women have remained as an oppressed group from the beginning of the history. Though some societies regard women as superior in the family and community, most of societies of the world have been treating women as second class citizens. Because of religious and cultural values and physical structure, women are forced to remain as dominated group around the globe, especially in the least developed nations. There is a solid evidence of discrimination of women worldwide.

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Even in the most developed nations which boast the best human rights situation in their country, women's participation in almost fields has been minimized because of male dominance. In many countries, women are kept as 'prisoners' as they are not allowed to participate many social and political activities. (Meenu Agrawal, Shobana Nelasco, 2009) In a stratified society like ours, access and empowerment of different section of the societies are becoming serious concerns and to address it planners, managers, social scientist all over the world have started deliberating and devising way out like anything. In this direction genders issues are dominating over other vulnerable issues like poverty, class conflicts, communities, ethnic issues etc. In ensuring an egalitarian development gender equity still remains as a pertinent question as it has been for the thousands of years of human civilization. Gender issues beyond its epistemological certainly imbibe other components like production relation, access to education, geographical distribution, occupational imperatives, marital system and even physical & physiological weaknesses. (Ram Naresh Thakur (2009)

The present deliberation will go contextual with the realm of women's empowerment in sustainable agriculture development. The sustainability of agriculture development has become a prerogative to the women's participation moving across the caste. (Shobana Nelasco & Junofy Antorzarina, 2009) Our need is to ascertain and assure the areas where women are still far from enjoying the minimum privileges and question of empowerment has been thrown to a very complex, integrated situation the access to resources, institution, decision making process and information etc. are the pertinent question in making the women empowered, confident, and accorded to the main stream social processes.

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