

Education: A Tool for Empowerment of Women

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Abstract

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"

-Jawaharlal Nehru

Empowerment is an active multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Empowerment literally means making someone powerful, facilitating the weak to attain strength, to increase one's self-esteem, to help someone to be assertive/self-confident, to enable someone to confront injustice and oppression and to support someone to fight for her rights. Educated women can play a pivotal role in eradicating poverty and accelerating development process. They can take active part in all the spheres of life. Educated mothers can take care of the education of their children irrespective of the boys or girls. The children in turn improve their capabilities and thereby enlarge their choices, enjoying long and healthy life, educated environment having access to the resources because of their better education qualifications. Thus peace, prosperity and stability of a family depend on the females who formulate the household budget in a manner that it builds up the healthy family environment. The family budget is oriented towards the provision of qualitative education and health facilities to the children so that they become competitive and promote cohesive social and economic development benefiting all the sections in the country. In this way the paper highlights process, indicators, levels of women empowerment, educational position of rural women, factors responsible for poor female literacy, education - a tool for empowerment and role of ICT in women's education for empowerment.

Introduction

Empowerment of women is directly linked with education. Women are the agents of change. Education is considered a key instrument for the change which is responsible for national development. It is true to the saying, "If you educate a boy you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a family, society and ultimately the nation". The National Policy on Education 1986 states, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators.

The year 2001 was declared as "Women's Empowerment year" while formulating policies to think of female development with a view to alleviating inequality between male and female and to bring them at par, is women empowerment, the concept is gaining significance throughout the world. The core of the concept of empowerment is-the "idea of power" Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. Empowerment is an active and multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all sphere of life. Empowerment of women is very much essential to achieve sustainable development. Education is the first step towards empowerment and the most crucial factor in over all development of the individuals as well as nation. Education is an effective instrument for social and economic development and national integration. Education enables women to understand their social and legal rights, become economically independent, acquire a voice in the affairs of the family and the community.

Objective of Education for Women

Pinto in his book "*Women power: technical education and development*" identified the following objectives of education for women:

- *Decision making ability*: the ability to weigh and to arrive at a valid and honest personal judgment;
- *Truth seeking*: a respect for and a reliance upon observable evidence vouched for by reliable groups;
- *Skills of living* : the ability to use those tools and machines which have wide application in one's society;
- *Communication*: the ability to convey to others orally in writing, graphically, or otherwise, information, opinions and conclusions;
- *Adaptation to change*: an awareness that knowledge, society and social values are all changing and ability to change oneself to maintain harmony with the environment;
- *Aesthetic awareness*: a recognition of beauty in the natural world, in the arts and in human relationships;
- *Commitment to society*: a knowledge of the different elements of social relationship and the ability to practice social skills, enabling individuals to interact in a mature way with one another and with the environment.

Indicators of Empowerment

Empowerment is a complex issue with varying interpretations in different societal, national and cultural contexts. At the level of the individual woman and her household, empowerment is:

- Participation in crucial decision-making process.
- Extent to which a woman takes control of her reproductive functions and decides on family size.
- Feeling and expression of pride and value in her work.
- Self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Existence of women organizations.
- Allocation of funds to women and women's projects.
- Increased number of women leaders at village, district provincial and national levels.
- Involvement of women in non-traditional tasks.
- Increased training programmes for women empowerment.
- Awareness of her social and political rights.

Process of Women Empowerment

The process of women's empowerment results in a redistribution of power within societies and groups as well as between men and women. The attainment of women's empowerment is also contingent on the extent to which the humanness of women and girls including their right to self-determination and autonomy is recognized and respected and the extent to which changes in patriarchal structures are facilitated.

The empowerment process is one where women begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively. It enables women to look at old problems in new ways, analyze their environment and situation, and recognize their strength and their self-image. The process of empowerment enables women to access new information and knowledge, acquire new skills, and initiate action aimed at gaining greater control over resources of various kind. Empowerment is not merely a change of mindset by a power demonstration of that change which the world around is forced to acknowledge. Armed with their growing strength, women begin to assert their right to control resources, including their bodies and participate equally in decision within the family, community, and village.

The process of empowerment has *five* dimensions.

1. *The cognitive dimension* refers to women having an understanding of the condition and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;
2. *The psychological dimension* includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;
3. *The economic component* requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;
4. *The political element* entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize for social change; and
5. There is a *physical element* of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

Levels of Women Empowerment

- a) Pre empowerment level
- b) Intra-personal (micro level)
- c) Interpersonal (mezzo level)
- d) Institutional (macro level)

Pre-empowerment level is the level of greater awareness about the prevailing system of subjugation of women in various realms of life. This awareness creates feelings of discontent which makes anyone to resist and to raise voice. At intrapersonal level the individual gains greater self-confidence and courage to resist exploitation and injustice practiced against them. At interpersonal level empowered women form a group and mutually reinforce their level of empowerment. Such groups gain collective strength to influence the society at large. At the institutional level the society as a whole decides to make institutional corrections to rectify the prevailing tender imbalances in both ideological as well as structural frameworks.

Educational Position of Rural Women

In rural areas particularly, the condition of women's education is still depressing and deplorable. In some bigger rural establishments, some elementary schools for them have been established; but they ill function under inadequate staff and equipment and indifferent management and inspection. There is absolutely no provision for their secondary, higher and technical education in rural areas. Boys from rural areas can avail themselves of higher education in towns but it is quite difficult for girls to get any such benefit. Mass poverty is

a stumbling-block in the way of women education. Consequently, a major fraction even of boys remains without education let alone the question of girls' education.

Factors Responsible for Poor Female Literacy

- Gender based inequality.
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation.
- Occupation of girl child in domestic chores.
- Low enrolment of girls in schools.
- Low retention rate and high drop out rate.

Education-A Tool for Empowerment

Education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, the parameters of which are:

- Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Developing ability to think critically.
- Fostering decision-making and action through collective processes.
- Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes.
- Providing information, knowledge and information relating to their rights and entitlements in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Role of ICT in Women Education for Empowerment

Today, women are emerging as leaders in the field of aeronautics, medicine, space, engineering, law, politics, education and business. In this decade, women are entering into the job market in increasing numbers. They are showing their skills even in non-traditional sectors like police, defense, administration, media and research fields. The best gift which women can give to their children is quality education through Information and Communication Technology.

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was first establishing Technology Information Centre's in eleven districts of Gujarat. Members of SEWA are able to access government schemes and tap into new markets. In the second phase, the center will also support the education of women. ICT-Enabled Social Net project explored the use of ICT as an empowerment tool for women in India through the establishment of an ICT Seva Kendra. The Seva Kendra caters exclusively to women, in an effort to encourage participation, build capacity and support their work towards social transformation.

The Ministry of Labour runs computer training for unemployed women. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has a project to enhance ICT skills of girl students from elementary through high school. The Ministry of Gender Equality has organized programmes at twelve Korean universities for women who want to work in an e-business or to start Home Office. Asian Pacific Women's Information Network Center (APWINC) at Sookmyung University trains women to work in IT, and in their own businesses. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry encourages the use of ICT by women farmers through onsite and mobile computer education and technical support services. The website also operates a shopping mall for agricultural products.

Conclusion

Healthy, safe, educated, empowered women transform families, communities and countries. There is need to realize women empowerment firstly we will try to minimize the literacy gap between man and women, give priority to educate a woman. Our former president *Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam* rightly says, "Empowering women is a pre-requisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thought and their value systems' lead to the development of a good family and ultimately a good nation". If a woman is aware of her rights, of herself, if her self - esteem is high, then she is empowered. But again when a woman is empowered, it does not necessarily mean that another individual becomes powerless or less powerful. On the contrary, if a woman is empowered, her competencies towards decision-making will surely influence her family's and neighbour's behaviour. Empowerment of women, therefore, needs to get utmost priority in any national planning process. As *Swami Vivekananda* said, "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future". The countries which realized the importance of empowering their women developed fast educating their women and is involving them in the decision-making process of social and economic development.

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