

18. Women Empowerment: A Study on Social and Economic Development Aspects

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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. Empowering a woman is the key issue in developing nations. Despite of the fact that women are an integral part of any society, yet their involvement in decision making via their active contribution in economic activities is very low. Women empowerment and economic development are interlinked, where on one hand, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between women and men while on the other hand, empowering women can benefit development. Providing consideration of working at individual consciousness level in order to develop women's sense of their own potentials and critical recognitions of the obstacles within social dimensions, so that women identify their potentials and put efforts together with other women like a distinctive power to confront inequalities and injustice, will turn out to be 'power for' positive societal modifications. This paper focuses on relationship hold by Social and Economic Development Aspects and Women Empowerment.

Keywords:

Women Empowerment, Development, equality, Social and Economic Aspects etc.

18.1 Introduction:

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.

Women empowerment refers to the process of enhancing women's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes. It is about providing equal opportunities in social, economic, political, and cultural domains, enabling women to achieve their full potential and lead independent lives.

18.2 Key Aspects of Women Empowerment:

1. **Education:** Ensuring access to quality education for girls and women is foundational. Education leads to increased awareness, better job prospects, and social independence.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Providing women with equal access to resources, jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities, and financial independence promotes economic growth and reduces poverty.
3. **Political Representation:** Encouraging women to participate in political processes and decision-making at all levels strengthens democracy and brings diverse perspectives to governance.
4. **Social and Cultural Inclusion:** Breaking societal stereotypes and promoting gender equality in all aspects of life helps create an inclusive environment for women.
5. **Legal Rights and Protection:** Enforcing laws against discrimination, harassment, and violence while ensuring equal property, inheritance, and employment rights are vital.
6. **Health and Well-being:** Addressing women-specific health issues, improving maternal care, and combating gender-based violence contribute significantly to empowerment.

Social Empowerment: A Voice Within the Community

Social empowerment refers to the ability of women and girls to act individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourses that exclude them and keep them in poverty. At home, this for instance involves the ability of women to decide and discuss with their partner whether or not to use contraceptives. Outside their home, it means that women and girls can build positive relationships, participate in social activities and decision making, without being restricted by gender norms.

Economic Empowerment: A Voice on Financial Independence:

Economic empowerment means that women have the skills and resources to improve their economic status and move out of poverty. In addition, it means that women and girls can decide on how to utilise their income and other resources and/or jointly make those decisions.

18.2.1 Women Empowerment: Key to Social and Economic Growth

Women empowerment is a crucial key to social and economic growth because of its transformative impact on societies, economies, and global progress. Here's how it contributes:

1. Social Growth:

- **Reduction of Inequality:** Empowered women help bridge the gender gap, fostering a more equitable society. Equal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership improve social harmony.
- **Improved Health and Education:** Women invest significantly in their families' health and education, creating a multiplier effect that benefits future generations.

- **Strengthened Communities:** Empowering women promotes inclusivity, reduces poverty, and enhances collective well-being by ensuring diverse voices are represented in decision-making processes.
- **Reduction in Violence:** Social empowerment equips women with the confidence and resources to resist and combat gender-based violence, contributing to a safer and healthier society.

2. Economic Growth:

- **Higher Labor Force Participation:** Bringing more women into the workforce significantly boosts economic productivity. Studies show that gender equality in employment can increase GDP substantially.
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Women entrepreneurs contribute to economic diversification and innovation, driving growth in emerging and traditional sectors alike.
- **Reduction in Poverty:** Economically empowered women are more likely to lift their families and communities out of poverty through stable incomes and investments in education and health.
- **Global Competitiveness:** Countries with higher gender equality in economic participation tend to rank better in global competitiveness indices.
- **Closing the Pay Gap:** Addressing wage disparities leads to more equitable income distribution and strengthens the economy.

18.2.2 Global Evidence:

1. **McKinsey Global Institute:** Achieving gender equality could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025.
2. **World Bank:** Increasing women's participation in the labor force by just 1% can boost economic output by 3-4%.
3. **UNDP:** Investing in women's education raises productivity and lowers societal costs.

Key Strategies to Drive Growth Through Empowerment:

1. **Access to Education:** Ensuring equal education opportunities leads to higher earning potential and career growth for women.
2. **Policy and Legislation:** Implementing laws to promote gender equality, maternity benefits, and equal pay is critical.
3. **Financial Inclusion:** Facilitating access to credit and resources for women entrepreneurs can ignite local economies.
4. **Leadership Development:** Encouraging women in leadership roles inspires societal change and economic advancement.

18.3 Relationship Between Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development:

The relationship between **women empowerment** and **socio-economic development** is deeply interconnected, as empowering women directly influences the growth, stability, and prosperity of societies and economies. Here's a breakdown of how they are linked:

1. Women Empowerment Drives Socio-Economic Development:

Economic Impacts:

- **Increased Workforce Participation:** When women are empowered, they join the workforce in greater numbers, contributing to economic productivity and growth.
 - Example: Studies show that closing the gender gap in labor participation could add trillions to global GDP.
- **Entrepreneurship Growth:** Women's entrepreneurship fosters economic diversification, innovation, and job creation.
- **Improved Household Income:** Empowered women contribute to family income, reducing poverty and enhancing living standards.

Social Impacts:

- **Better Education Outcomes:** Educated and empowered women are more likely to prioritize education for their children, creating a cycle of improved literacy and skills in the next generation.
- **Reduced Population Growth:** Women with access to education and reproductive health make informed family planning decisions, stabilizing population growth and reducing strain on resources.
- **Enhanced Health Outcomes:** Empowered women invest in healthcare for themselves and their families, reducing child and maternal mortality rates.

2. Socio-Economic Development Fosters Women Empowerment:

Economic Opportunities:

- Economic development creates more job opportunities for women, enabling financial independence and empowerment.
- Infrastructure development, such as schools, healthcare, and transportation, allows women to access resources and participate fully in society.

Social Progress:

- Development efforts often prioritize education and healthcare, key factors in women empowerment.
- Changing societal norms through education and awareness campaigns helps break traditional gender barriers.

18.4 The Cycle of Empowerment and Development:

Women empowerment and socio-economic development are mutually reinforcing in a virtuous cycle:

1. **Empowered Women → Economic Growth:** Women's participation in economic activities leads to growth, innovation, and poverty reduction.

2. **Economic Growth** → **Social Investment**: Increased national income allows governments and organizations to invest in education, healthcare, and women's rights.
3. **Social Investments** → **Empowered Women**: Improved access to resources further strengthens women's empowerment.

Examples of Empowerment's Impact on Development:

1. **Bangladesh**: Empowering women through microfinance and education has significantly reduced poverty and improved social indicators like literacy and health.
2. **Rwanda**: Women's representation in leadership roles (over 60% in Parliament) has led to inclusive policies and rapid economic development.
3. **Nordic Countries**: High gender equality correlates with strong economic performance and high social welfare standards.

18.5 Current Status of Women:

- **One in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty** (10.3 per cent). If current trends continue, by 2030, an estimated 8 per cent of the world's female population – 342.4 million women and girls – will still be living on less than \$2.15 a day. Most (220.9 million) will reside in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Women are less likely to have access to social protection.** Gender inequalities in employment and job quality result in gaps in access to social protection acquired through employment, such as pensions, unemployment benefits, or maternity protection. Coverage of women lags behind men by 8 per cent (34.3 per cent and 26.5 per cent, respectively). Globally, an estimated 73.5 per cent of women in wage employment do not have access to social protection.
- **Women are more food insecure than men.** Gender gaps in food insecurity have grown from 1.7 per cent in 2019 to more than 4 per cent in 2021, with 31.9 per cent of women moderately or severely food insecure compared to 27.6 per cent of men. This is even more acute for older and indigenous women, women of African descent, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities, and those living in rural and remote areas.
- **Women and girls suffer most from the dearth of safely managed water and sanitation.** Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 70 per cent of households without access to water on premises. Menstrual hygiene management is difficult in the absence of water, soap, and gender-responsive sanitation facilities, whether at home, school, or work.

18.6 Women Migrant Workers:

- **It is estimated that women represent 48 per cent of the 281 million international migrants.** Women who migrate as workers face various challenges, including potential gender discrimination in the job market and a lack of support networks in a foreign country. Many women migrate as family members rather than solely for employment opportunities. These factors can lead to fewer women being represented among migrant workers.
- **Women migrant workers remit substantial portions of their earnings, sending as much or even more than men,** despite limited disaggregated data on remittances, gender inequalities in the labour market, and gender wage gaps globally.

- **Women migrant workers are more likely than men to remit regularly owing to women's stronger links to family members** and self-insurance motives to financially protect themselves and their families, underlining the link between a woman's caregiving role in the household and her increasing propensity to remit.
- **Women migrant workers populate informal, low paid, and unregulated work.** As of 2021, the main sectors in which women migrant workers are employed are: services (79.9 per cent), industry (14.2 per cent), and agriculture (5.9 per cent). More women migrant workers than men work in service-related jobs, often owing to an increasing demand for workers in the care industry, such as healthcare and domestic work.
- **Of the more than 67 million domestic workers over the age of 15, 80 per cent are women and one in five is a migrant worker.**

18.7 Women Empowerment: Case Studies:

Case Study: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the daughter, Educate the daughter):

This government initiative launched in 2015 aims to address the declining child sex ratio and promote girls' education. It works at multiple levels, including raising awareness, improving healthcare facilities, and providing financial assistance for girls' education. While the program is still in its early stages, it has raised **awareness about the importance of girls' education** and addressed **gender discrimination**.

Case Study: The Rise of Women in STEM Fields

While challenges remain, there's a growing number of Indian **women pursuing careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields**. This signifies a shift in societal perceptions and a recognition of women's capabilities. Organizations like the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Department of Science and Technology are actively promoting women's participation in STEM.

Breaking Barriers: Empowering Women in the Workplace

Equal access to employment opportunities is essential for **women's economic empowerment**. However, gender disparities in the workplace remain a significant challenge. Here's how India is tackling this:

18.8 Conclusion:

Women's empowerment is essential for achieving social progress and sustainable development. Empowered women can contribute to creating a more just and equitable society by promoting gender equality, advocating for their rights, and participating in decision-making processes. However, achieving gender equality is still a significant challenge, and we must continue to work towards creating a more equitable and just society for everyone. Empowering women is not just a moral imperative but a strategic approach to achieving sustainable socio-economic development. By addressing gender disparities, nations unlock the potential for economic growth, social stability, and long-term prosperity.

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