

Education: An Instrument to Enhance Women Empowerment and Inclusive Growth

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Abstract Education provides a basis for a positive change and transformation of the society. This exposes new and innovative thoughts, understanding and important skills in a person towards developing self and surroundings. Education empowers women to understand the economics of managing resources and grab the opportunities for value generation in a micro (household) and macro (societal) level. The topic exhibits about the necessity of women education and benefits thereto in the process of competitiveness of a society and a nation at large. Researchers say that educating a woman means educating a family. More empowered the women are; more empowered would be the society. Educated women have multiple advantages (tangible and intangible) as far as families' and social needs are concerned. They play various roles as a responsible citizens, housewives, mothers etc. and also as contributors to families' income. Women accounts for half of the human resource. Despite various awareness programmes, regulations worldwide on gender equality and women empowerment, the situation is not good. According to United Nations Development Programme, two thirds of global illiterate population is women. 7 out of 10 women are reported experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, says UN Women. Women earn only 10 % of all the income, only 1% of the property and yet produce half of the world's food. Irrespective of class, culture or income, women are discriminated all over. The situation in developing and undeveloped countries is worse. According to a global poll by Thomson Reuters, India is said to be the 4th most dangerous country in the world. India needs to do a lot as far as security, freedom, economic empowerment etc. are concerned. Education can play a crucial role in enhancing their social status and empower them to stand against the discrimination. This is a tool to encourage them to attain self reliance and gives them power to fight against the evils.

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“If you educate a boy, you create a good man at best; but if you educate a woman, you educate a family and transform a society.”

Mahatma Gandhi

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INTRODUCTION

Investment in female education has a long lasting impact and it adds value to the society. The labour force participation of women in India is shockingly just 22.5 % for 2011-12 as per National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). Most of the women around are found to be engaged in domestic duties. Thus half of country's human resources can be said unutilized properly. This non- performing asset if economically included can do wonders for the economy and lead the country from the top. Narrowing the gender gaps at workplace and thinking process of Male colleagues would generate premium which can be transformed into an asset and their economic contribution can enhance the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income. Education provides women an understanding about their rights and power to fight the economic and social discrimination. This is a key for prosperity development and welfare. An educated woman provides an infrastructure for a family to grow up in a competitive world. Studies reveal that she brings better, educated and healthier children and thus carries social and economic productiveness in the micro economy i.e. household. Education results in low infant mortality, low mortality rate and most importantly a measure to control population. Literate women are more likely to spend on improving health, education, infrastructure and poverty. Thus it can be said that an educated woman plays a crucial role in enhancing livelihood standards of a household. A more participatory environment and equal sharing of resources and opportunities can do wonders. The picture below depicts the benefit of education in empowering women socially and economically.

Education empowers women



Government of India has started working for a more women friendly environment and has taken several initiatives to empower them, still we have

lowest literacy rate in Asia. An action oriented approach seems to be the necessity in the current state of affairs. The table below shows female to male literacy rates for some countries.

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Table 1: Female to male literacy ratio

	Brazil	China	India	United States
Literacy rate	1	0.91	0.65	1
Enrolment in primary education	0.94	1	0.94	0.96
Enrolment in secondary education	1.1	0.97	0.79	1.02
Enrolment in tertiary education	1.02	0.85	0.66	1.19

Source: UNDP

This shows how the secondary and tertiary enrolment is decreasing. Local Governments with civil society organizations will have to work harder to make the community aware about the benefits of female literacy. A more inclusive guidelines and stricter adherence may help the government to include this economically excluded population.

Literature Review

Empowerment is a process for capacity building (Kabeer, 2001; Malhotra, 2002; Alsop et al., 2005; Martinez, 2006). Education enables women build their views, understanding and help families, societies and nation as a whole to gain competitiveness. Empowerment consists of various elements like resources generation, control, opportunities. Thus in the process of measurement of empowerment, the allocation of assets, will and capacity can be defining factors (Charlier and Caubergs, 2007). Sharing of resources and ownership of assets in particular provides an opportunity for women to enhance the employment opportunities in developing countries like India (Agarwal, 2001). An educated woman has better bargaining powers through the channels of increased information and thus provides autonomy (Rahman and Rao, 2004). Participation in education, skills training programmes increases the jobs prospects and economic empowerment (Phipps and Burton, 1998). The benefits thereby are numerous from financial to social contribution and most importantly voice and participation in the decision making processes. The paper discusses about various aspects of education in women empowerment. The objective of the paper is to understand the benefits of education in empowering the women participation in the decision making and economic empowerment in the society.

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Inclusive development: Millennium Development Goal (MDG)

With an objective to develop inclusively, United Nations (UN) member states and various international organizations committed to achieve various millennium development goals by 2015. The millennium declaration signed in Sep 2000 consists of 8 goals. Women empowerment has become a prominent issue worldwide and it is understood that the empowerment of women is the most important factor behind poverty alleviation and achieving millennium development goals (MDG). “Promote Gender equality and Empower Women” has been emphasized as root goal among the eight goals which can be emphasized for an all round equitable development. The objective of the goal was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels by 2015. The latest report on gender dimensions by UN Women says

- a. Gradually we are moving towards the goal and girls’ participation in primary education is at parity with boys. Still only 2 out of 130 countries have achieved the targets at all levels of education.
- b. In the non agricultural sector, around 40% jobs are held by women in 2011 which is satisfactory but not meeting the targets again.
- c. Worldwide, women parliamentarians account for around 20% till Jan 31, 2013.

Slowly, the women participation and economic empowerment has been an important issue for the economies all over. This can provide enormous economic opportunities for the economies to enhance the competitiveness. This brings an empowered society and an empowered nation at large. Governments need to focus more on the sensitizing the communities on gender equality, strong and effective regulations and incentives etc. can surely produce desired results. A gender neutral economy is inclusive one in a real sense and it helps in achieving the targets as per the declaration. The picture below shows a holistic view of women empowerment.

Factors in Women Empowerment



All the factors in the process of empowering women, if are analysed properly would have same basis i.e. empowerment through education. Education provides necessary understanding and capability to avail all other factors as per the figure above.

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Government Initiatives to improve women literacy in India

Government of India has also taken several initiatives to let women participate in the mainstream society. Various policies and programmes have been started to enhance the literacy and economic empowerment of women workforce. To name a few,

i. Mahila Samakhya Program

This has been a rural wing of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), started in 1988 in accordance with New Education policy, 1968. It has an objective to help and empower weaker sections of rural women.

ii. Sakshaar Bharat Mission (Female literacy)

Launched with a mission to enhance the female participation in education and create a literate India. This had been formulated with an objective to achieve 80% literacy level by 2012 and to reduce the gap of male-female literacy ratio by not more than 10%. The focus has been on adult female literacy rate through imparting relevant skills and training programmes, functional literacy, promoting learning society and provision for continuing education especially in the rural areas.

iii. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme

The scheme has been launched in 2004 with a mission to enhance the livelihood of girls from backward classes with a provision for education. The schools admit 75% of its students from backward classes and 25% from Below Poverty level (BPL). The scheme integrated with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme to facilitate education for them especially in the educationally backward areas by setting up boarding facilities till elementary level. The main objective of the programme has been to enhance the enrolment ratio of girls in the educationally backward sections of the society and to give them a voice towards empowerment.

iv. National Policy on Education

A unit of National Education for Women has an objective to empower women through providing value based education. The scheme comprise of materials based on the needs of a woman. So that, education can have a significant

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contribution imparting value based knowledge and learning outcomes to empower the locality.

v. Scholarships

Various scholarship programmes have been started by central and states governments to enhance the awareness and encourage the girls to come up and study. These have helped families ignorant towards female education citing the financial difficulties. The scholarship programmes are Single girl child scholarship for women, Scholarship for women scientists, Maulana Azad national scholarship for minority girls etc.

vi. Training of Female teachers

The scheme provides trainings to the female teachers. The training programmes under this scheme consist of technical training, knowledge sharing, behavioral trainings, theoretical training to enhance their capability to teach students better.

vii. National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level

Under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), the programme launched to enhance the literacy rate of females at elementary level. The programme has helped in upgrading the literacy level in the most backward regions. The programme is focused on rural outreach and it is said that it reaches where Sarva siksha Abhiyan did not reach.

The policies' initiatives, schemes and openness of information have gradually led people to take steps towards a participatory and equal society. The situation has improved a lot but still governments and institutions need to play a proactive role as far as including the female in the mainstream of economy generation.

CONCLUSION

Education plays one of the most significant roles for women in enhancing their livelihood conditions. There are various drawbacks of not educating women like limited prospects, decreased family income, risk of exploitation, limited economic progression of a country at large. The unutilized human resource in terms of women especially in developing countries is a cause of concern. Education gives them voice and ability to make decision and influence the positive change in the community. This is core to enhance economic prosperity and can help in achieving other millennium development goals as per the millennium declaration much prior to the deadlines. Governments need to increase the pace of empowerment schemes meant for women in a more

accountable manner to increase the potential of this enormous financial and social resource. Women education can prove to be single solution for almost all the issues in the economy like, population control, peace and security, economic generation, poverty alleviation, knowledge pool, equity, self reliance etc.

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