

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN A GLOBALIZED ERA

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### ABSTRACT

*In the era of globalization and liberalization, the role of women has taken a multifaceted dimension. It has not been restricted to home but has crossed the threshold. As Indian economy is gradually becoming a fastest growing economy, the contribution of women is also growing at a steady pace. Women of Indian economy now perform a dual role. Their contribution in GNP is significant as much as their role in the family sphere. But what are still faced by them are the various forms of discrimination on gender grounds, working conditions and working environment.*

*As women constitute almost half of the total population, their role in present society has become all the more pertinent than ever with the changing outlook of the society. With the world being connected like a global village, women's involvement in almost all spheres demands an upliftment. As per Census 2011, workers constitute 39.79 percent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 percent. A general figure of the workers in India as per 2001 Census, of about 397 million workers in India, 123.9 million workers are women, out of which 106 million works in rural areas and the remaining 18 million work in urban areas. Although more women seek work, vast majority of them get only poorly paid jobs in the informal sector without any job security or social security. Women workers have tremendously increased not only in the rural sector but also in the urban sector. In spite of such a high contribution of female workers in the Indian economy, women are not being paid according to their contribution. A prejudice still lies that woman is physically inferior to man in strength and capacity to work. The situation becomes all the more adverse when in spite of equal work, women are paid less because she is a woman.*

*The present paper focuses on the significance of the women to economic development and the constraints that are faced in realizing the full potential of women in the process of economic development. The paper also delves into the strategy and the appropriate action required in removing these constraints.*

**Keywords:** Indian economy, discrimination, economic development, dual role

As Samuelson (1976) maintains, *'It has been quite impossible to differentiate between the cooperative roles of men and women in producing GNP. In developing economies, the discrimination against women is seen more than in developed countries. In these countries, work force participation rates of women are significantly lower.'*

These lines by Samuelson way back in 1976 still holds true in this era of liberalization and globalization. Though the role of women has taken a multifaceted dimension wherein she has traversed from the threshold of home to the workplace. The contribution in GNP of Indian women in particular has been growing at a steady pace. As per Census 2011, workers constitute 39.79 percent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 percent. It is undoubtedly an increase when compared to 14.68 percent in 2001 Census.

Most Indian women undertake employment only under economic compulsion to supplement the family income. They thus enter the informal sector and get employed as part time helpers in construction units, tanneris, beedi industries and the like. Their dual role as a significant contributor to GNP and fulfilling their family responsibilities with the same dedication force the society to change their outlook. Their role in present society has thus become all the more pertinent as they constitute almost half of the total population. The problems of gender discrimination, health related problems, exploitation, working conditions and working environment are some of the many issues which needs a serious probe if the contribution of women needs to be enhanced in the economy.

## WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT- A BACKGROUND

The pertinent question that arises is why at all there is a need to invest in women. Why must the gender issues be resolved? Before delving into such areas, an evolution of thinking towards women and development need to be focused.

In 1970s, it was noted through research on African farmers that development was not gender neutral, rather it was gender blind and as such could harm women. There came in a **"Women in Development"** approach which marked that the exclusion of women was problem of development. Women had no control over resources and lacked existence in the market sphere. It was then legislatively marked that the development should bring **'in'** women and the discrimination should be limited. This could be possible through promoting education and giving them employment. This approach targeted at women and made their contribution in productive activities and income generating areas more visible.

The basic lacuna that this approach had was that it did not tackle the basic structural problem: **"the unequal gender roles"**. If better access to water was made available it would lessen the amount of time that the women and the girls would be spending in domestic activities, giving them available hours for education and employment. But the question arises as to why collecting water is the responsibility of females only. Is the need of water meant only for women and girls and not for men?

The answer to this question led to the introduction of **"Gender and Development"** approach in 1980s. It recognized that gender roles and relations are keys to improve the lives of women. The term gender now focused both on men and women. This approach emphasized upon the fact that it is just not sufficient to include women in development process but it is at the same time essential to analyze why they are being excluded. The notion of 'development' is being questioned. *Is it mere a narrow understanding of development in economic growth that is significant or the development intakes both social and human development. The GAD calls for a more holistic approach.* There is a need to address women's strategic gender interests. It eliminates the institutionalized forms of discrimination like land rights, right to live free from violence etc.

Thus in 1990s, many NGOs and agencies adopted a **"Rights-Based Approach"**. An awareness of the recognition of women's demand for legitimate

claims was recognized. The right to live free from violence, not limiting to domestic violence but to gender based too. Thus a shift in understanding was developed wherein the meaning of development accrued not just to economic development but to holistic social development, the main driver being economic development.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

**Gender mainstreaming** has now become the main concern of majority of large development organization and agencies. It implies a gendered perspective to all activities including planning, implementation and monitoring of all programmes, projects and legislation. **Gender is thus placed at the heart of development.** It has clearly been observed that women still suffer from violence across the globe and lack full and equal participation in economic and political life. **Thus mainstreaming is yet to succeed. A continuous effort is required for prioritizing the integration of women into the development process.**

**Some studies:** The researches<sup>i</sup> made to support the '**Gender Mainstreaming Strategy**' launched in 2001 by the World Bank gives influential evidence on the importance of women in economic development. A significant conclusion that came out of such researches was that the *economies which discriminated by gender, experienced less economic growth than those economies which treated the gender at par.* World Bank (2001a) reports that where society showed gender disparity, it suffered from economically inefficient outcomes. A prediction says that if the African countries did away with the gender gap in schooling between 1960 and 1990 as East Asia did, it would have experienced a doubling of its per capita income.

Another report by World Bank (2001b) states that gender system affects growth by influencing the productivity of labour and the allocative efficiency of the economy. The agricultural output could increase by an estimated 6 to 20 percent if the women farmers have same

accessibility to productive inputs and human capital as to men.

## EFFICIENCY AND EQUITY ARGUMENT

May it be industries like textiles or electronic transnational corporations, the innate quality of women as being reliable, productive and being considered a cheap labour force places her as a preferred workforce. The microfinance programmes perceives women as being good with paying back loans and thus targets women more than men. Women are also recognized as efficient distributors of goods and services within the households, in efforts to alleviate poverty through cash transfer programmes.

It can well be justified that it is the efficiency of women that brings a pace in the development process in the economy and thus brings about an equity concern too. It is important to note that gender equality will assist in bringing about economic growth; economic growth may not necessarily bring gender equality. Advancing gender equality requires strengthening different dimensions of women's autonomy: economic and political autonomy, full citizenship and freedom from all forms of violence.

## PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

The increased role of women has been the central driver of economic growth. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development.

As the 2012 World Development Report highlights, empowering half of the potential workforce has significant economic benefits beyond promoting just gender equality. This empowerment is just not limited to increased female labor force participation but also accrue in reducing gender discrimination and wage differentials and promoting talented women into leadership and managerial roles.

The data by the World Economic Forum 2012 Gender Gap Index ranked India 123<sup>rd</sup> out of 135 countries on economic participation and opportunity. The Global Gender Gap Report 2011 states that India scores average on the gender gap index overall while the grim side is that its score for women's economic participation and opportunity is worse than 95 percent of all countries taken in the study.

***It gives rise to many significant questions:***

- *What explains these huge disparities in women's economic participation in India?*
- *Is it poor infrastructure, or limited resources or the gender composition of the labour force and industries?*
- *Or is it the deficiencies in social and business networks and a low share of incumbent entrepreneurs?*

## **WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Overall the female business ownership share increased from 26 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2005. On employment weighted basis, the rate increased from 17 to 25 percent.<sup>ii</sup> Higher than average rates of female entrepreneurship is found in Kerela, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka while states of Haryana, Delhi, Bihar, Gujarat rank in contrast, with low female business ownership. The states with highest female service sector ownership rates are Kerela, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, exceeding more than 12 percent. Development economists mention the role of business networks among women in developing countries and explore the importance of the gender profile of the incumbent industrial structures.

Economic growth and development of any economy is based upon the successful utilization of the entire workforce, both male and female. Though the Indian economy has made rapid economic advancement, India's gender balance in economic participation and entrepreneurship remains among the lowest in the world.

**In order to correct gender imbalance through policy and to bring more economic participation and growth,** better access to education and infrastructure is needed. It is inadequacy in the infrastructure that affects women like that of transport, roads within village which poses a bottleneck in their geographic mobility and questions their safety and security as well. **A remedial measure is that of investment in local transport infrastructure** which may remove the constraint to female entrepreneurship and enable them to access markets. Unlocking female empowerment and entrepreneurship is a direct path to shared prosperity and a more dynamic and sustained growth.

## **CONSTRAINTS ON REALIZING FULL POTENTIAL OF WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

World Bank Gender and Development Group (WBGDG, 2003) reported that **'education, healthy women are more able to engage in productive activities, find formal sector employment, earn higher incomes and enjoy greater returns to schooling than uneducated women...'** an investment in human capital brings positive short and long term results, in terms of higher productivity, and controlling population growth. Greater equal access of girls to primary education is visible but still inequality in access to secondary and higher education persists. Moreover it has been observed that girls do not opt for the study of science and technology, thus limiting their employment opportunities in the future.

Gender imbalance still persists in the allocation of resources to girls and boys. Even today, sending the girls to school, providing nutrition to them and attending to their health care is determined by the income of the family and the cost of these services than in the case for boys. Many countries still carry laws that discriminate women in family, property, employment, etc. it is estimated

that women own only 1 % of property and lack of rights to inherit or own land. Limit their engagement in large scale cash production. In some states, early and forced marriages of girls prevent them from further education and employment. A progressive outlook still lack among the society. Religions do play a key role in furthering discrimination among women and girls. Economic fundamentalism, policies and practices that privilege profits over people, also deny rights to women as workers and to work. A limited voice of the women in the political culture restricts their full participation in formal systems of power as well.

Women engaged in paid work often face double work day, since they may only be allowed to work when they are able to fulfil their domestic responsibilities. This may severely impact their health and well-being. This has severe repercussion when the daughters are held at home to share the domestic work, thus putting a negative impact on their education and their ability to acquire work in future.

The concerning issue is that when women start working, men may withhold their income, leaving women and children with access to the same level of resources. Care needs to be taken to ensure that programmes serve women's needs and women are not merely placed at the service of these policy agendas. It is important to remember that policies to promote economic development that include women but do not tackle the structural inequalities at the base of their exclusion may bring growth gains, but will not necessarily bring gender equality gains.

## HOW TO UNBLOCK THESE CONSTRAINTS

There is a need to respect and defend women's sexual and reproductive health rights. This is quite critical for social and economic development. Sexual, emotional and physical violence and the threat of violence limits women's mobility, thus keep them away from being engaged in the process of

development. Men and boys can have a role to play in the prevention of gender based and the promotion of gender equality.

There is a need to strengthen women's access to both formal and informal justice systems so that their rights, opportunity and participation are ensured. Improved political voice also becomes crucial.

Policies to provide for affordable and quality child care and adequate health services may bring women to enter paid employment and their domestic responsibility becomes a collective responsibility. Full and decent employment opportunities, access to finance, providing social protection and valuing her efforts in the development process, hold the key to economic growth.

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<sup>i</sup> Dollar and Gatti 1999, Klasen 1999

<sup>ii</sup> [www.worldbank.org/economicpremise](http://www.worldbank.org/economicpremise)