

Paper -women education

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Paper code-303

Deptt.of Education

Semester-3rd

MMHA&PU,PATNA

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

'EMPOWERMENT' MAY be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them.¹ Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women.² The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the following factors in its definition of women empowerment:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Dimensions and Parameters of Women Empowerment

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

- The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro

levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;

- 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;
- 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;
- The political element entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize for social change;
- 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.

Indicators of Women Empowerment

Beijing Conference 1995 had identified certain quantitative and qualitative indicators of women empowerment. These indicators are discussed below:

Qualitative Indicators:

(i) increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;

(ii) increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;

(iii) increase in personal leisure time and time for child care;

(iv) increase on decrease of workloads in new programmes;

(v) change in roles and responsibility in family and community;

(vi) visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;

- (vii) responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
- (viii) visible changes in women's participation level attending meetings, participating and demanding participation;
- (ix) increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
- (x) increase access to and ability to gather information;
- (xi) formation of women collectives;
- (xii) positive changes in social attitudes;
- (xiii) awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;
- (xiv) women's decision-making over her work and income.

Quantitative Indicators

- (a) demographic trends
 - maternal mortality rate
 - fertility rate
 - sex ratio
 - life expectancy at birth
 - average age of marriage
- (b) Number of women participating in different development programmes;
- (c) Greater access and control over community resources/ government schemes—creche, credit cooperative, non-formal education;
- (d) Visible change in physical health status and nutritional level;
- (e) Change in literacy and enrollment levels; and
- (f) Participation levels of women in political process.

OBJECTIVES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- To identify gaps in the empowerment of women, development of children and adolescents;
- Create a national network of public, private and NGO centres for delivering reproductive and child health services free to any client;
- To create an enabling environment through convergence with other programmes;
- To open more child care centres for working women and expand the availability of safe abortion care;
- To use energy saving devices to reduce drudgery of women;
- To identify the ways in which the effects of policies and programmatic interventions to promote women's empowerment have been measured;
- To improve access to sanitation, drinking water, fuel, wood and fodder for women;
- To develop health management and health package at all levels;
- To improve accessibility and quality of maternal and child health care services;
- To identify the evidence on how women's empowerment affects important development outcomes such as health, education, fertility behaviour, income levels, etc.
- Supporting community activities package for women;
- To improve and increase clinical and contraception delivery services;10
- To organise educational and empowerment programmes for girls and women;
- To train resource persons, animators and trainers for activities visualised;
- To conduct and promote experimentations and innovations and research in the problems and programmes of empowerment of rural women;
- To increase awareness in women, for their development to use their talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole;

- To develop the skills for self-decision- taking capabilities in women and to allow them to present their point of view effectively in society;
- To create awareness among women to be truly ambitious and to dream for betterment;
- To make efforts in organising the women for fighting against the problems and difficulties related to them; and
- To integrate socio-economic activities with concern for health and environment protection in the light of the rural women culture.

Women Empowerment in India

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974- 78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. India has also ratified various International conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

The Cairo conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society— political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was

devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in 2001.

Women Empowerment Policy 2001

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- The *de jure* and *de facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres—political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations.

Initiatives taken for Empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups and women in difficult circumstances

- Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation
- Integrated Child Development Scheme
- National Rural Health Mission
- Janani Suraksha Yojana
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances
- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)
- Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)
- Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana(RSBY)