



Role of Women Empowerment in Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

The use of a women's labour force in the economic development of the country is minimal. The political sphere of the country is, by and large, covered by men. Women unanimously cited gender-based violence (GBV) as a widespread and persistent challenge, directly fuelled and exacerbated. In addition, women's rights are not properly being protected in order for women to participate in various the issues of their country but are subjected to abysmal violations. Moreover, women are highly affected by environmental problems, and less emphasis is given to their participation in protecting the environment. There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. The fact that women constitute half the entire population of the country makes empowering them to be an active part of all development initiatives in the country a compelling circumstance. Hence, in this paper researcher will discussed some strong commitment of the government and society to empower women and utilize all the potentials of the country to bring about sustainable development. Further, this paper will highlight how the role of empowering women can be helpful to achieving gender equality in the sustainable development.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Environment, Gender equality

1. Introduction

The issue of women's empowerment and gender equality is at the top of agendas across the world, as gender inequality is widespread in all cultures. In developing countries, gender disparity is highly rampant compared to the developed countries. The status of women in the Indian society is in a process of change. ¹The women are now able to lead a more independent lifestyle and have more options open to them than in the traditional society of the past years. This opening of the system has led to a temporary state of imbalance where the role expectations from women, and their pattern of socialization is, still at times, governed by the old codes of conduct even fields open to them. How the women adopt and remain well adjusted within these situations is the focus of this research investigation. An attempt was made to compare certain need related personality aspects and self-esteem of married employed, married unemployed and single employed women in the present study.²As far as the organization of the study is concerned, this paper attempts first to conceptualize some terms. Accordingly, the definitions of women's empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development will be addressed based on the literature, and such definitions will, mutatis mutandis, be applied to the paper throughout the discussion. Later, the paper will address the crucial importance of empowering women and achieving gender equality for the sustainable development.

¹Alvarez, Lopez, Michelle, 2013. From unheard screams to powerful voices: a case study of Women's political empowerment in the Philippines. In: 12th National Convention on Statistics (NCS) EDSA Shangrila Hotel, Mandaluyong City October 1e2, 2013.

²Dr. Geetatiwarithe dimensions of India women pp1,2

2 Conceptualization of terms

2.1. What is women's empowerment?

Empowerment can be defined as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important”³. In the same way, women's empowerment refers to “women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them”. Accordingly, empowerments central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels. It involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training and raising awareness. Hence, women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life determining choices across different issues in the country. Another, almost-related and equally important concept is gender equality. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.⁴ It is also defined as a situation where “... all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favour equally”. The ultimate goal of gender equality is the nonexistence of discrimination on the basis. Of one's gender. To this end, empowerment of women has an indispensable role which is why the researcher preferred to use both terms together throughout the discussion. Therefore, sustainable development denotes achieving a balance among the three pillars sustainably.

2.2 What is sustainable development?

We ought to think we all are leaves of a tree and the tree is all of humanity we can not live without others without tree⁵

The concept of sustainable development arises due to the change of human perception as to what development is. Development perspectives shifted gradually, leading to what we perceive today as sustainable development. In the 1950s and 1960s, the focus was on the economic growth and productive capacity of a country. However, in the 1970s, the focus shifted to equity matters, i.e., social development and income distribution, as awareness grew of the prevailing gap between rich and poor. In the same period, environmental protection came into the picture as one component of development: knowing the impact of economic growth on the environment. Hence, sustainable development is perceived broadly nowadays. Accordingly, the most frequently cited definition of sustainable development is “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It calls for attention to be paid to the interest of future generations while attempting to satisfy our present needs. Following the aforesaid changes in development perspectives, sustainable development is also understood to have three interrelated pillars: economic.⁶

From India's point of view, Sustainable Development Goals need to bring together development and environment into a single set of targets. The fault line, as ever in global conferences, is the inappropriate balance between environment and development...we could also view the SDGs and the post 2015 agenda as an opportunity for revisiting and fine-tuning the MDG framework and sustainably regaining focus on developmental issues.”need to bring together development and environment into a

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⁴<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality>

⁵<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232555> 1 p.m.

⁶Warth, Lisa, Koparanova, Malinka, 2012. Empowering Women for Sustainable Development, Discussion Paper Series, No. 2012.1. United Nations Economic Commission For Europe, Geneva, Switzerland.

single set of targets. The fault line, as ever in global conferences, is the inappropriate balance between environment and development...we could also view the SDGs and the post 2015 agenda as an opportunity for revisiting and fine-tuning the MDG framework and sustainably regaining focus on developmental issues.”⁷

According to a United Nations report, India’s population currently encompasses about 1.2 billion people and is expected to grow by another 300 million within the next couple of decades. With cities generating two-thirds of the country’s economic output, an increasing number of Indians are leaving rural areas to seek employment in cities, relying on an efficient urban infrastructure. By 2030 it is predicted that 68 Indian cities will each have more than one million inhabitants, and six megacities, more than ten million each. The rapid growth of cities causes a large number of challenges, including insufficient power supply, unreliable public transportation systems and limited access to adequate medical treatment.⁸

3. Why should we empower women and achieve gender equality?

A number of studies have shown that sustainable development is impossible without women’s empowerment and gender equality. Consequently, it is asserted that gender equality is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable development. It is also affirmed that gender disparity is prevalent across the cultures of the world and that without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved. Empowerment of women is very much essential to achieve sustainable development. ⁹, the News Letter of BernardVanLeer Foundation says, that there can be no sustainable development without development for women, because it is women who contribute most for the development for children.

In order to play their various roles in the preservation of ecological balance and in maintaining sustainable development there is the urgent need for strengthening their lands by empowering them. the world ecology report says, that the empowerment of women has multiple benefits not only for the environment but also for humanity as well Ensuring sustainable development requires women's empowerment and their full, equal and beneficial involvement in decision making process related to sustainable development. it also requires their full participation as planners, managers, scientists and technical advisers in all environment and development fields.¹⁰

seeking a just and healthy planet, pledged their commitment to the empowerment of women which is the central and powerful force in the search for a safe environment, economic and social justice, adequate reallocation of resources, the survival of all species and the common goal of a healthy planet in which future generation can flourish.¹¹

Therefore, in this paper, women's empowerment and gender equality are discussed as a means to bring about sustainable development in the country.

3.1. Economic growth

Today the role of women has become vital and is the key in the process of economic development. Infect the development of women as well as the development by the women became the inter-related issues for the economic development of India. Women's participation in education, social life,

⁷ Yogesh Singh Sustainable Development and India Aug 22, 2017

⁸ <http://www.siemens.co.in/sustainable-development-in-india>

⁹ UNFPA report, "the state of World Population 1992"

¹⁰ United Nations 1991 report, "Challenges to the year 2000",

¹¹ the Earth Summit held in Rio (3-14 June 1992) Women's treaty for NGOS

industrialisation, science and technology, employment as well as in politics began to increase here day-by-day. The women in the last decade of the 20th century occupied the key role in different sectors of the society. They are sharing with the men not only in the economic growth process, but in the field of administration¹²

It is very difficult to develop an objective measure to assess the contribution of males and females to the economic theory because both males and females contribute to the economic theory in an undefined manner. However, till today the evaluation of their work except the one used by the committee awarding noble prize in economics. And such data are never published. So we propose to study the contribution of gender in the different spheres of economics, i.e., in the sphere of production, consumption, investment, distribution of income, saving, etc.; this type of analysis will then reveal the contribution of male and female to the economic theory and also reflect their relative efficiency in the different spheres of economics.¹³

Women must be integrated into the development process not only symbolically, and through concrete local projects, but in the most central processes of resource allocation in development planning. From the 1950s to the 1990s the position of women particularly in economic structures was either forgotten or omitted, the voices of women's movements were neither properly heard nor registered adequately. In April 1972, when the United Nations proclaimed 1975 as the International Women's Year, "Women's issues" or rather "Women's problems" as they were called then, had been on the agenda of several conferences at local, national and international levels. On 23 April 1991 the preparatory committee of the UN Conference on Environment and Development adopted a resolution entitled Women in Environment and Development. This resolution requested the government to take the gender dimension into account in submitting national reports to the 1992 Rio Conference and called for development of human resources "for the protection and enhancement of the environment".¹⁴

3.1.1 Emergence of Economic Feminism

The term Economic Feminism first used in 1974 by a French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne is given to a wholeness of theory and practice and is concerned with elimination of the gap between mythology and reality. It describes women's potential to effect environmental change; and is also about enforcement rather than legislation. The basic thesis of "Economic Feminism" is that the present culture, environment and systems are against women and do not include women's concerns. A development model that destroys the fertility of land, it is argued, creates landlessness and makes women destitute. For this reason, economic feminists start their work in small groups and community-based personal affinity in rural areas (Uma Devi, 1995)¹⁵. This idea of economic feminism is grouped around nature-women linkage, opposition to domination of nature by culture and belief in non-hierarchical networks in nature.

3.1.2 Women and poverty

Economic development based on Science which had tended to over-exploit the natural resources is also found to be the vehicle through which the poor are exploited by the rich in the less developed

¹² Banerji Anita San Raj kumar Women and economic development pp4

¹³ Rana. R. K. A Comparative Analysis of the Contribution of Genders to Economic Theory: A Case Study of India

¹⁴ VARADARAJAN DHULASI BIRUNDHA on Women and Their Interaction in Sustainable Development

¹⁵ Uma Devi (1995), "Eco-Feminism and the Ecologically Sustainable Development", Pillai and Nair (Ed.), Understanding Ecologically Sustainable Economic Development, John Martein Institute Publication.

countries and the women by men. Hence, all these are the results of the masculine accumulation instinct of patriarchy. Statistical evidence and feminist research now show that women constitute a large majority among low-income groups and are often the victims of poverty and environmental degradation despite their substantive contribution to economic wealth and management of natural resources. In the third world countries over 800 million people continue to live in absolute poverty, three-fourth of whom are women and children.

3.1.3 Women and technology

Technology in general is defined as an integrated set of techniques pertaining to modes of living and mediating between society and environment. When issues of technology are discussed one should also bear in mind that they carry the cultural, social and political codes of the originating environment. Sustainable development management requires that corporate executives use natural resources in an environmentally efficient and conserving manner, reducing waste to minimum.

3.2. Political development/good governance

Political development/good governance is an essential instrument for sustainable development There is a strong assertion that a balanced achievement of all the pillars of sustainable development depends on the deliberate strategic and operational intervention of the government. Accordingly, good governance undoubtedly corroborates the achievement of economic and social development and environmental protection. As a result, there is a need for a well-established, quality political or governance system. To this end, active involvement of women in decision-making positions will help foster the overall quality of governance in terms of boosting accountability and transparency, reducing corruption, and protecting the interest of marginalized sections of society without women, achieving sustainable development is impossible. The term 'political participation' has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to 'Right to Vote', but simultaneously relates to participation in: decision-making process, political activism, political consciousness, etc. Women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation. ¹⁶To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments.

Women turnout during India's parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. India ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament. The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labour, and reserving elected positions for women. These numbers are way below the 33% reservation demand proposed in unimplemented Women's Reservations Bill. If the recent trends continue, it will take well over 10 decades to see adequate proportionate representation of women in Indian politics.¹⁷

3.3. Social development

Social development is a key pillar of sustainable development. And social transformation as a component of sustainable development is unthinkable without the involvement of women. Women in Indian society have come a long way from the days of being worshipped as goddesses to being molested and harassed—gruesome domestic violence cases, acid attacks and rapes. Statistics pertaining to crimes against women have been comprehensively recorded and collated by the National Crimes Records Bureau under various headlines such as trafficking, dowry deaths and rapes. These statistics are alarming. It is imperative for all Indians to tackle these problems and improve initiatives

¹⁶VardhanPratap Women's Representation in Indian Politics <https://gramener.com/enumter/women-india-mla-mp/>

¹⁷<https://www.constitution.org/cons/india/p04.html>

and legislation that empower women and girls. Over the years, a steady rise in the adversities faced by Indian women and girls has taken place. Some major challenges that India faces are poverty, a lack of education, health and safety. Although the Indian constitution grants certain constitutional and legal privileges to women pertaining to equality and fundamental rights, some special provisions were also introduced to strengthen the process of providing equal status to women. These special initiatives include.

4. Preamble

The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures justice, social, economic and political; equality of status and opportunity and dignity to the individual. Thus, it treats both men and women equal.

5. Constitutional Rights to Women

1. The rights and safeguards enshrined in the constitution for women in India are listed below:
2. The state shall not discriminate against any citizen of India on the ground of sex [Article 15(1)].
3. The state is empowered to make any special provision for women. In other words, this provision enables the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women [Article 15(3)].
4. No citizen shall be discriminated against or be ineligible for any employment or office under the state on the ground of sex [Article 16(2)].
5. Traffic in human beings and forced labour are prohibited [Article 23(1)].
6. The state to secure for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39(a)].
7. The state to secure equal pay for equal work for both Indian men and women [Article 39(d)].
8. The state is required to ensure that the health and strength of women workers are not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their strength [Article 39(e)].
9. The state shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief [Article 42].
10. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51-A(e)].
11. One-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women [Article 243-D(3)].
12. One-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women [Article 243-D(4)].
13. One-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women [Article 243-T(3)].
14. The offices of chairpersons in the Municipalities shall be reserved for women in such manner as the State Legislature may provide [Article 243-T(4)].

6. Legal Rights to Women

The following various legislation's contain several rights and safeguards for women:

2. Indian Penal Code, 1860: 3. Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973:

Under S. 125, Code of Criminal Procedure, a woman has got right to maintenance.

4. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) is a comprehensive legislation to protect women in India from all forms of domestic violence. It also covers women who have been/are in a relationship with the abuser and are subjected to violence of any kind—physical, sexual, mental, verbal or emotional.

1. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1956).

2. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1986) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act (1987) provides for the more effective prevention of the commission of sati and its glorification on women.

3. Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)
4. Maternity Benefit Act (1961) Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (1994) prohibits sex selection before or after conception and prevents the misuse of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for sex determination leading to female foeticide.
5. Equal Remuneration Act (1976)
6. Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act (1939)
7. Muslim Women (Protection Rights on Divorce) Act (1986)
8. Family Courts Act (1984)
9. Indian Penal Code (1860) contains provisions to protect Indian women from dowry death, rape, kidnapping, cruelty and other offences. Sections 292, 293 and 294 304(b)312 to 318 354 366-A 494 497 498-A .509
10. Code of Criminal Procedure (1973) has certain safeguards for women like obligation of a person to maintain his wife, arrest of woman by female police and so on.
11. Indian Christian Marriage Act (1872)
12. Legal Services Authorities Act (1987)
13. Hindu Marriage Act (1955) introduced
14. Hindu Succession Act (1956)
15. Minimum Wages Act (1948)
16. Mines Act (1952) and Factories Act (1948) prohibits the employment of women between 7 P.M. to 6 A.M. in mines and factories and provides for their safety and welfare.
17. Indian Evidence Act, 1872

The following other legislation's also contain certain rights and safeguards for women:

1. Employees' State Insurance Act (1948)
2. Plantation Labour Act (1951)
3. Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1976)
4. Legal Practitioners (Women) Act (1923)
5. Indian Succession Act (1925)
6. Indian Divorce Act (1869)
7. Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act (1936)
8. Special Marriage Act (1954)
9. Foreign Marriage Act (1969)
10. Indian Evidence Act (1872)
11. Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956).
12. National Commission for Women Act (1990) .
13. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal). Act (2013) ¹⁸

Case laws

- Vishaka Vs State of Rajasthan¹⁹ Bhanwari Devi, a social worker from Rajasthan, was brutally gang-raped by five men for preventing a child marriage. Determined to seek justice, she decided to go to court. In a shocking decision, the trial court acquitted all five accused. Vishaka, a Group for Women's Education and Research, took up the cause of Bhanwari Devi. It joined forces with four other women's organisations, and filed a petition before the Supreme Court of India on the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace. On August 13, 1997, the Supreme Court commissioned the Vishaka guidelines that defined sexual harassment and put the onus on the employers to provide a safe working environment for women.
- Mary Roy Vs State of Kerala ²⁰ Women from the Syrian Christian community in Kerala were prevented from inheriting property due to patriarchal traditions. This decree was challenged by

¹⁸<https://edugeneral.org/blog/polity/women-rights-in-india>

¹⁹(1997) 6 SCC 241As

²⁰1986 AIR 1011, 1986 SCR (1) 371

Mary Roy, a woman's right activist and educator. After the demise of her father, she filed a case against her elder brother when she was denied equal share in the family's inheritance. Though the plea was rejected by the lower court, the Kerala High Court overruled the previous judgment. In 1986, the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment that granted Syrian Christian women the right to seek an equal share in their father's property.

- LaxmiVs Union Of India²¹ In 2006, Laxmi, an acid attack victim, filed a petition seeking measures to regulate the sale of acid and provide adequate compensation to the victim. Taking cognizance of the number of cases relating to acid attacks against women on the rise, the Supreme Court imposed stringent regulations on the sale of acid in 2013. The ruling banned over the counter sale of acid. it illegal to sell acid to a person below 18 years.
- Centre for enquiry into Health and Allied themes (CEHAT) Vs Union of India ²² With the advent of pre-natal diagnostic techniques that could determine the sex of a fetus, the growing trend of aborting female fetuses was observed. In a bid to curtail female feticide, the government of India issued the PNDT Act in 1996. The provisions of the PNDT Act,
- ShamimaFarooqui v. Shahid Khan [6 April 2015]²³ Supreme Court held that women cannot be treated as beggars and their grace cannot be lowered in rightful claim to maintenance after divorce if the husband has since then retired from his service.²⁴
- BudhadevKarmaskar State of West Bengal²⁵
- In this case, a sex worker was brutally murdered by appellant Buddhadev. The appellant Buddhadev kicked her with fists and legs, and she fell down on the floor. The appellant then caught her by her hair and banged her head against the floor and the wall several times which left the victim bleeding from her ear, nose and head. The incident was witnessed by four persons, Abida, Maya, Asha and Parvati.
- ABC v. The State (NCT of Delhi)²⁶Supreme Court in this latest and landmark judgment declared that now, an unwed mother is not bound to disclose the name of child's father and also, she would have all the rights as a guardian to child under guardianships rights. She need not take father's consent for guardianship rights. Not only it was necessary to protect the child from social stigma but, also to protect mother's fundamental right. It was certainly an avant-garde verdict on gender quality.
- Dhannulal and ors. V. Ganeshram and ors.²⁷In this case, it was held by the division bench that continuous cohabitation of a couple together that is, 'live-in relationship' would raise the presumption of marriage unless otherwise proven. This was a case regarding the dispute for the property that their grandfather possessed would also be inherited by the woman with whom he lived for 20 years or not as she was not his legally wedded wife.

7. Conclusion

The concept of sustainable development is a multidimensional concept. It embraces economic and social development as well as environmental protection. In this study, however, the issues of political development/good governance and human rights protection are discussed with an equal degree of emphasis, as we believe that they have equal and direct relevance to the achievement of the full use of their potential for economic, social, political and environmental development is not being carried out

²¹ 20WP (Crl.) No. 129 of 2006

²²Writ Petition (civil) 301 of 2000

²³CRIMINAL APPEAL NOS.564-565 OF 2015

²⁴CHETAN BOHRA ROLE OF INDIAN JUDICIARY IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
urlhttp://www.acadpubl.eu/hub

²⁵LC-2011-SC-CRL-Feb 14

²⁶SLP (Civil) No. 28367 of 2011, DB:VikramajitSen,J; Abhay Manohar Sapre,J on 6 July, 2015

²⁷8 April, 2015; Bench: M.Y. Eqbal,J and AmitavaRoy,J

due to the widespread gender gap. This paper concludes that attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality, thereby using the entire potential of the country. Thus, this paper suggests that the government needs to work hard to change the existing position of women and achieve gender equality, which will have a positive spill over effect on the sustainable development of the country.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, this paper calls upon the government to take the following measures to bring about sustainable development in the country.

- Empowering women and making full use of their labour force for economic growth.
- Educating and maintaining the health of women to enhance productivity and social development.
- Empowering women and providing them with fair representation across different decision-making levels of the government structure to better protect women's interests and to achieve quality governance.
- Protecting the rights of women to make them active participants in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other arenas of the country, thereby bringing about development.
- Protecting the environment to bring about sustainable development, as the environment is the key source of the country's economy. Empowering women to play an equal role in the protection and management of the environment, with their special knowledge and expertise, is also essential for sustainable development.

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