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Women empowerment: A futuristic approach of India

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Abstract

This article provides an overview on empowerment of women in India, including the definition, indicators, factors determine empowerment of women, and the role of SHGs in empowering women through credit facilities. It would help to develop a suitable indicator for measuring the empowerment of women for the present investigation. Therefore, this chapter chiefly focuses on meaning and need of women empowerment in India, conceptualization and definition of women empowerment, various indicators to judge women empowerment at the worldwide level, various literature relating to past studies conducted on measurement of empowerment, the levels of women empowerment and factors determining empowerment, necessity to organize groups for women empowerment, etc.

Keywords: Human Development Report, Gender Empowerment Measure, Gender Development Index, Indian Human development Survey

1. Meaning of women empowerment

The notion of empowerment has evolved over the years since the 19th century. In a broader sense, empowerment means enlargement of independence of choice and action, which comes with increasing one's authority and controller over the assets and decisions that affect one's life. It is a procedure of change by which individuals or groups gain power^[1] with the ability to take governor over their survives that lead to improved comfort, access to resources and raising self-confidence. The World Bank describes empowerment as *"the procedure of growing the volume of persons or collections to create selections and renovate those selections into preferred activities and results. Central to this process is actions which build both specific and cooperative sources, expand the competence and evenhandedness of the administrative and official situation which oversee the use of these resources"*.² It too categorizes four important components of empowerment to draft established transformations: contact to data; inclusion and contribution; liability and local administrative capability. Empowerment is more narrowly associated to the individuals who are disempowered or helpless due to certain socio financial and traditional obstacles in the humanity of which they are part. The practice of empowerment in the social facilities has appeared from struggles to mature more operative and approachable facilities for women, individuals of colour, and other oppressed groups. Among them, women are more vulnerable and discriminated, both inside and outside of the households. The male dominated society always oppresses the women in socio economic aspects, which reduce the power and restrict their choices. It leads to limit the independency of women and disempowered them within the society. Therefore, there is a serious requirement for empowerment of women to performance on their own behalf; to achieve a greater governor over their survives and destinies. In order to bring women into the mainstream of development, the Government of India has acknowledged 2001 as the "Year of Women Empowerment".

1. Empowerment is consisting of the prefix "em" is involved to the noun "power" to form a verb. This attach is castoff to form verbs meaning "to create, mark into or like, cause to be. Thus "to empower" is to create or cause power
2. <http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/68byDocName/whatisempowermentfo urareasofpractice>

2. Definition of women empowerment

Various researchers have defined women empowerment in varied ways to formulate policies and programs for the development of women.

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Karl (1995) points out that empowerment of women means acquisition control over their exists, and participation in decisions that affects them in the home and community, administration and worldwide development policies. According to Pillai (1995), women empowerment is a lively, multi-dimensional procedure which permits women to understand their full distinctiveness and controls in all domains of life. Power is neither a product to be handled nor can it be given away as charities. Power has to be developed, and once learned it necessities to be implemented, continued and well-looked-after. Kabeer (1999) emphasizes that power within is crucial as a primary step of empowerment, which arises out of reflections and analysis of women's subordination and acts as a new form of consciousness. It helps women to create planned lifetime selections, which are crucial to their lives. Thus, she believes that the change in the self-perception that involves undoing negative social construction, believing in oneself as having the capacity and the right to act is a vital component of empowerment. The Secretariat of the United Nations defines women's empowerment as having five components: first, a belief in individual self-worth; second, the right to take decisions; third, the power to access opportunities and resources; fourth, the skill to govern their public and private lives; and fifth, the opportunity to engage within society in order to influence nations and the world [3]. Rowlands (1997) defines empowerment as a procedure whereby women develop ability to establish themselves to rise their own independence, declare their right to create self-governing choices and control resources, which will assist them in stimulating and removing their own subordination. She states that the idea of power is at the core of the word 'empowerment'. The power can be understood in a number of ways.

3. Secretariat of the United Nations, Guidelines on Women Empowerment, <http://www.un.org/popin.unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwe mp.gdl.html>

Power within: Enabling women to communicative their own ambitions and plans for variation. It is a personal or psychological power in the minds of the people which focuses on their sense of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and helps in raising consciousness.

Power to: Allowing women to improve the essential abilities and contact the required assets to attain their aspirations. It involves capacity building, supporting individual decision making and leadership.

Power with: Allowing women to inspect and articulate their shared benefits, to establish and to attain them and to relation with other establishments for variation. It involves social mobilization, building alliances and coalitions. It is a collective force where people cooperate with each other to solve problems and to achieve goals.

Power over: Enabling women to change the fundamental differences in power and resources, which make women's ambitions and their skill to attain them.

Thus, the 'power over' is controlling power; 'power to' is procreative or creative power creating new possibilities and actions; 'power with' is relational and 'power within' is seen in terms of self-reliance and self-esteem. The three levels of empowerment which are closely interlinked such as 'power within', 'power to' and 'power with' help women to tackle 'power over'. Personal empowerment or 'power within' is the key to the entire empowerment process as it

plays a very important role in bringing about a change in gender conditioning and renegotiating her role within the family and the community through collective empowerment i.e. "power with" (Rowlands, 1997).

3. Measurement of women's empowerment

Despite empowerment of women and elimination of gender disparities being one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), no key efforts have been completed so far to advance a demanding technique for assessing and tracking variations in the stages of empowerment (HDR, 2003). At the global level, United Nations Development Programs (UNDP's) Human Development Report (HDR) of 1995 introduced Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to capture the empowerment of women. The Gender Development Index (GDI) receipts into account dissimilarity in attainments amongst females and males with respect to life probability at birth, adult literateness rate and projected earned income for different countries. On the other hand, the GEM evaluates women's share of seats in the parliamentary assemblies, the share of supervisory posts, high administrative posts and technical posts assumed by women, and the estimated share of income from work of women compared to that of men. The GDI emphasizes on the extension of competences, where as the GEM is concerned with the use of those abilities to take benefit of the prospects of life. The HDR takes into account some aspects of female empowerment like economic participation, political participation and power over the economic resources, and to certain extent, it explains the degree of their empowerment. The UNDP found a very strong relationship between GEM and GDI and its Human Development Index. For instance, the HDI score of India increased from 0.584 in 1996 to 0.648 in 2006. Similarly, the GDI score increased from 0.568 in 1996 to 0.633 in 2006. The aggregate score of GEM for India was 0.413 in 1996, which slightly increased to 0.451 in 2006 (WCD, 2009) [4].

Besides GDI and GEM, there are many other features that resolve the level of women empowerment. Though a woman is well-educated and operational, she may not be exercising her power relating to domestic decision-making, financial autonomy (e.g. control over the resources), mobility/freedom of movement, work independency, child-related issues (e.g. well-being, schooling, health, marriage, etc.), and contribution in the present sector. Due to this, different micro level research studies used various indicators to measure the empowerment of women. The available literature measured women empowerment by developing various indicators based on both hypothetical and experiential research findings. The theoretical group of researchers developed a conceptual model to understand the empowerment of women. On the other hand, the empirical group of researchers believed to have measured empowerment of women through empirical studies. The present research reviewed both theoretical and empirical research for developing suitable indicator to measure empowerment of women and applied logistic regression to trace factors influencing women empowerment in Indian context.

4. Empowerment of women in India with reference to Yamunanagar

This study has used Indian Human development Survey (IHDS) of 2005 to measure the empowerment of women at district level. The IHDS dataset was produced by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi, and the University of Maryland. The survey has collected data related to income, employment, women empowerment, etc. from 41,554 households across India. It covered 2,064 households in Haryana with 113 households belonging to Yamunanagar district. The survey incorporated a few questions related to decision making, wife beating in the community and freedoms of movement of the women

covering all districts in India.

Decision making of women

In order to assess women's decision-making autonomy, IHDS-2005 collected information on women's participation with respect to five different types of decisions: what to cook, large household purchases, number of children, what to do if the child falls sick and son's or daughter's marriage. Women were asked as to whom mostly makes each decision: mainly they, mainly their husband, the senior male, the senior female or others.

Table 1: Women's decision making

Items	Percentage of women mostly take decisions alone on	India	Haryana	Yamunanagar
1	What to cook on a daily basis	74.58	78.48	79.01
2	Expensive household purchases like T.V/Fridge	11.01	9.22	20.99
3	How many children you have	19.62	21.87	32
4	What to do if the child feel sick	30.57	25.53	81.33
5	To whom your son or daughter should marry	10.33	8.20	12

Source: Computations are based on figures obtained from IHDS (2005)

Table 1 shows the proportion of women making decisions alone on different aspects at the household level in India, Haryana and the reference district of Yamunanagar. The women belonging to the district of Yamunanagar are seen to have higher participation in all types of decisions as compared to women in general belonging to Haryana and India. For instance, the proportion of women taking decision alone on expensive household purchases works out at 11 percent for India, 9 percent for Haryana, and 21 per cent for the district of Yamunanagar. As against Haryana and India, the district of Yamunanagar shows much higher proportion of women taking decisions relating to cooking, number of children, child's sickness, and son's or daughter's marriage.

Conclusion

It can be stated that there are different factors like age, education, area of living, employment through SHGs, caste, religion and number of children, which play a significant part in improving women's decision-making power and freedom of movement. Besides, age of marriage, spouse's age difference, husband's education, current employment status, etc. are additional variables that might have influence on empowerment of women. With the above brief conceptual understanding of empowerment, what strategies can be used effectively to empower women is the major issue that needs to be addressed? Some direct interventions have to be made in the economy for organizing the women and enhancing their collective strength.

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