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The role and responsibilities of education in economic empowerment of women

Introduction:

Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and concretization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly it involves at the psychological level women's ability to assert them and this is constructed by the 'gender roles' assigned to her especially in a cultural which resists change like India.

The program of action for implementation of NPE (POA) spells out the meaning of women's empowerment. Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. The parameters of empowerment are:

- Building a positive self-image and self confidence;
- Developing ability to think critically;
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action;
- Ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change;
- Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society;
- Providing the wherewithal for economic independence....

Best examples of women empowerment can be seen in today's world as we see many women in top positions working side by side with their male colleagues. Though this used to be a male dominant society but from a few years a clear rise in women participation in workplace is noticed. We can now find women in sports, politics, education, army; they are engineers, doctors, pilots and involved in so many other professions. Thus, women should be encouraged to learn and should be provided with opportunity to gain education to groom them as well as to educate the nation.

Education is the most important part of human development. Generally education is evaluated or measured in terms of numbers through the ability or capacity of reading and writing. But actually education is not limited merely to one's ability or capacity of reading and writing. Education should touch each and every aspect of human life. For example, if we talk about woman, the role and responsibility of education is to touch every walk of her life. It means to make her independent in every way.

In today's world we are facing so many changes within seconds that it is becoming difficult to cope with this fast moving world. To avoid the generation gap between mother and her kids, education is very important. If a mother is not aware of the technological advancements and the new terminologies, she won't be able to guide her kids properly. Also this is important for her self grooming. Thus, education of a woman opens up the new horizons, broadens her thinking, develops new ideas and hopes, enhances knowledge and skills, provides the courage to meet the challenges of life and give freedom of expressions.

Education is important for both men and women. Previously woman education was neglected or was not paid much attention to but now the situation is changed. After making the woman education free, the old scenario has changed. Now a day there is no gap between the enrolment of girls and boys in schools. Education will be used as an agent of basic changes in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of

women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventional role in empowerment of women. Woman's educational status itself is a step from inequality to equality. Education empowers women socially, economically, emotionally, legally and so on.

The Role and responsibilities of Education in economic Empowerment of Women:

Issues related to economic empowerment of women:

When we talk about 'economic empowerment of women', it means women's control over economic resources and strengthening the economic security of women. We must understand that the biggest problem faced today is that their work is not recognized at all. Studies have revealed that women carry two third of the total work load in the country and receive not more than 10% of the total wages, out of which they probably do not get even 1% for their own use. An important reason for the low participation of girls in education among the disadvantaged sections of the population is that girls from a very early age begin to take care of their younger siblings and to house-hold work to relieve their parents to go out for work. Thus, such girls indirectly generate income. Women have always contributed to the society and the economy in the form of a helping hand and in the form of part time and temporary workers in developed countries. In fact the recent statistics of the UN tell us that 53% of work in developing countries is carried out by women and out of \$ 16 trillion global output which is invisible, \$ 11 trillion is contributed by women. Even after so much contribution there is a lack of acknowledgement regarding the role of women in every sphere of life. It is in fact about the deep rooted bias and discrimination against women as well as lack of education that is prevalent in the society.

It is sad to note that a woman is in a disadvantageous and deprives position even regarding the basic rights of education and health. Further, women are kept out of the decision making power structure in every sphere of life including the political, economic, social and religious structures of the society. Majority of women who are working in the informal economies as part time workers have less access to basic health care services, education, financial resources, employee rights and land ownerships. In urban areas a large number of women are employed as unskilled labor in building construction industry besides other occupations. These female laborers benefit the contractor and sub-contractors to keep profit margins high. Domestic work offers another main avenue to women and girls for employment. These workers like others in the unorganized sector have remained grossly neglected to get even a fraction of benefits from governmental programs and schemes for women. This sector especially is the most unregulated and disorganized.

Figures of women's employment are very important indicators of the fact that the participation of women in the total work force of the country is actually decreasing. There has been a 7 percent fall in women's employment between 1961 and 1981. These statistical figures of women's employment are very important or the determination of women's status.

Steps taken and the improved economic status:

However, in spite of these depressing statistics it is also to be noted that though in terms of quantity the participation of women in the total labor force is declining in terms of quality, the diversity of occupations of which women can enter are willing to enter irrespective of the traditionally or unconventionally of the occupations, is showing an upward trend.

Women development has been witnessed in the past decades and efforts for their development in various spheres have been examined with care. Socio-economic, political and legal changes necessary for equation of the status of women at par with men have been activated. Women have been considered equal partners in national development. Several development programs, specially designed for women to play their role in the national mainstream, have been implemented. Contribution of women in the area of rural development and agriculture, supportive services like fuel and fodder, water and political and social participation have now been recognized. Woman's employment in the organized sector grew from 19.30 lakhs in 1971 to an estimated 33.41 lakhs in 1986. It is steadily going up in rural India. A large share of employment in the rural unorganized sector is of women. Women mostly in employment in this sector are working in agriculture, social and agro-forestry, khadi and village industries, handloom, handicrafts and sericulture.

In order to make woman's life more worth, it is very important for them to be economically independent. I personally feel that educational policies have tried their best to do the same. Women's Groups are an important part of the strategy for women's involvement in several development and

welfare programs. These Women's Groups carry the message of the programs to the community and create awareness on the issues of specific concern to women and mobilize the support of the community functionaries to facilitate the implementation of the programs. Some of these groups are mentioned below:

- **Indira Mahila Yojana:** This yojana at village level helps in creating awareness in the community and in women on the equality of status and importance of education. So far about 7000 women's groups have been formed.
- **Mahila Sanghas:** Mahila Sanghas are women's group formed under the program of Mahila Samakhya which aims at achieving equality through education. This Sanghas are a forum for discussion of women's problem particularly those related to economy and self image as women. So far 4,826 Sanghas have been formed.
- **World Bank Assisted ICDS:** Under the World Bank assisted ICDS I and II projects income generative activities are carried out through active Women's groups. These groups are given financial assistance for providing training and skill up gradation and taking up income generation activities. National
- **Credit Fund:** The National Credit Fund aims to provide a resources base to reach credit to poor woman. Under the scheme Self Help Groups of women are formed to promote savings by members and build up thrift fund which can be revolved among members. So far about 8000 groups have been formed.
- **DWACRA:** The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) program aims at improving women's access to the services like health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation. Under the scheme poor rural women are organized into women's groups and provided assistance under TRYSEM program and subsidy for taking up group economic activities for income generation. At least 1.85 lakh groups have been formed till now.

The employment potential for women is likely to grow very slowly in the organized sector. On the other hand, there is a considerable scope for employment in the agricultural and service sectors. Diversification in agriculture and in other major sectors of rural employment offers enormous potential for employment. Horticulture, commercial vegetable growing, food processing, fisheries and poultry, agro-industry etc. offer ample opportunities to rural women. Following are a few issues that show her improved economic status in society and also show the benefits of her being economically empowered.

- Education affects income-economic status directly. Today's economic life is complex where it is important for both husband and wife to earn and that is why an educated young man wants to marry an educated (literate) woman so that she can earn for the family.
- Women use major chunk of their income for providing their family better healthcare, education and nutrition. This has a tremendous impact on the growth and development of the next generation who are the future seeds of human evolution.
- Steady income in hand makes woman more confident to take economic and other decisions related to her family.
- It has been seen that when women start earning they also adopt more of environmental friendly lifestyle as well as they tend to have lower fertility rates leading to fewer children.
- Stable income and financial independence leads to improvement and progress in women's lives through various efforts like contraception, age of marriage, fertility, child mortality and modern sector employment.
- Economic empowerment of women leading to steady income generation and financial independence will definitely help women take decisions and select the best among choices in their personal and professional lives.
- Once women are economically empowered, they become the biggest assets of their family, the society, the nation and the world in terms of their savings and their efforts towards the overall development of the family, the society as well as the nation.

Initiative steps to be taken for economic empowerment of women: Economic empowerment of women can be initiated by working on some very fundamental issues like training and education of women for gainful income generation, bringing about gender sensitization in all spheres of human life as well as initiating awareness programs which can help women make informed choice regarding various aspects of their lives. Following are some major initiatives which can be taken towards economic empowerment of women.

- Recognizing that education and training are important for economic empowerment of women in the short term as well as long term periods.

- To acknowledge and accept the glaring gender based bias that is so much prevalent in all parts of the world and taking concrete steps towards gender analysis and gender sensitization in every sphere of human life.
- Empowering women who are part of the labor force by increasing awareness regarding the rights of an employee.
- Work on the communication skills of women so that they become self-confident and master the techniques of advocacy and negotiation.
- Encouraging and supporting women entrepreneurs to develop marketable models of enterprise through expert guidance and "skills development" support.
- Planning educational and training modules for women based on their professional as well as home commitments and helping women to balance between the two.
- Using communication technology to galvanize women for a radical shift in their thinking through shared experiences of success and skills. These communication activities can be taken across the rural and urban landscape for motivating women to take up self empowerment programs.
- Educating and training women to gainfully engage in markets and institutions where they primarily go for generating income.
- Impart vocational or employment related knowledge and skills.
- A variety of new occupations could be created for women workers in the areas of agro-based industry weaving, textile printing, readymade garments, production of stationary and preparation of indigenous herbal medicines and packaging etc.
- Publicizing the central role of women in the national economies and celebrating the success stories of women entrepreneurship and women professionalism in every field.
- Gender training and sensitization of the current structures of the society represented by the government, social bodies and private enterprises.
- Providing opportunities to women for interlinking and interacting across border for economic empowerment. Networking, export development and joint venture promotion among female entrepreneurs and relevant associations can be taken under the interlinking and interacting activities.
- In addition to courses leading to degree/diploma, short courses in specific subjects through summer school sessions, and ad hoc programs like seminars, workshops etc. should be organized for working women with a view to upgrading their knowledge and skills, not necessarily leading to degrees.
- Maximum utilization of existing infrastructure, e.g., formal school buildings for providing non-formal education. Some of these factors have far-reaching implications and are by no means easy to ensure. In all non-formal education programs special attention should be given to the needs of rural women who are the most disadvantaged, both socially and economically.
- In order to be truly effective, the overall employment strategy for women should be viewed as a package comprising employment opportunities, legal safeguards, training support and social services, awareness generation and mobilization. Only then will a purposeful synergy be achieved.

Conclusion:

The Indian constitution guarantees equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment and directs the state to secure equal rights to an adequate means of livelihood, equal pay for equal work and just and humane conditions of work.

Prejudices regarding women's efficiency, productivity, capacity for skills and suitability debar them from employment in many areas, and result in wage discrimination. The criteria for determining their unsuitability for particular types of jobs are not clear or uniform. Recasting the employment policy for women requires re-examination of existing theories regarding their suitability for different types of work of scientific lines, and deliberate efforts to promote equality of opportunity by special attention to women's disability and handicaps. Our recommendations aim to make the constitutional guarantees meaningful and arrest the trend toward gradual exclusion of women from their rights to a fuller participation in the economic process.

We therefore recommend the adoption of a well defined policy to fulfill the constitutional directives and government's long-term objective of total involvement of women in national development. Such a policy should be framed by a government resolution. This policy will need to be implemented carefully to avoid evasion by direct or indirect methods. Apart from specific occupations from which women are debarred by laws, employers should not be permitted to exclude them from any occupations unless the basis for unsuitability is clearly specified.

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