

## **ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: WOMEN FIRST, PROSPERITY FOR ALL**

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*Women's economic empowerment is one of the important determinant and pre requisite for the overall and sustainable development of any country. The objective of inclusive and equitable society could not be achieved without women's empowerment. **When more women work, economies grow.** Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part. India is the world's largest democracy and fastest growing economy, Women's participation in the labour force is quite low, and has been falling over the last few years. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and the equal remuneration act, 1976, ensures equal wages and equal work, but this is still a far reality. Evidence from a range of countries shows that increasing the share of household income controlled by women, either through their own earnings or cash transfers, changes spending in ways that benefit children. The successful Self Help Groups, Micro Finance Institution consisting fully of women have proved their capability, trustworthiness in managing finances. This paper makes an attempt to review the existing Government policies/programmes/schemes attempting towards of financial empowerment of women. A way forward for financial strengthening of women through international experiences is provided in the paper.*

### **Introduction**

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”

– Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

The above quote by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru clearly specifies the fact that prosperity of a nation depends on status of women of the country. Women's economic empowerment is one of the key determinant and pre requisite for the overall and sustainable development of any country. The objective of inclusive and equitable society could not be achieved without women's empowerment. Economic empowerment is the capacity of both men and women to take part in, contribute to and get profit from the growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a reasonable distribution of the benefits of growth.

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**The economies will grow, when more women work or participate in the economic activity.**

Whether the issue is improving education, eradicating poverty or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and participation in political and economic perspectives of the society.

The World Bank's 2012 World Development Report specified that "Gender Equality and Development, closing these gender gaps matters for development and policymaking. **Greater gender equality can enhance economic productivity, improve development outcomes for the future generations, and make institutions and policies more representative**". This report stresses that women participation in economic activity is not only necessary for achieving higher levels of growth but also benefiting the future generation by providing better access to services, education, health care facilities etc.

If women, who account for half the world's working-age population, do not harness their full economic potential, the economies will suffer. Gender inequalities retard country's growth. As per Mckinsey study (2015)<sup>3</sup>, women are half the world's working-age population but generate only 37% of GDP. Further, 75% of the globally unpaid work is done by women. The share of regional output generated by women is only 17 percent in India, 18 percent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and 24 percent in South Asia (excluding India). In North America and Oceania, China, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the share is 40 to 41 percent.

**Mickensey Global Institute study finds that closing gender gaps in labour-force participation rates, part-time versus full-time work and the composition of employment would add 12-25% to global GDP by 2025.** Other studies, using a variety of methodologies, find similar potential gains. Hence, gender equality, the **Empowerment of Women**, which includes active participation in economic activity, political sphere, equal access to property and liberty, has been recognized as the important Millennium Development Goal to achieve economic and social development.

*Further, World Economic Forum stressed that investing in women and girls will have a multitier effect on productivity efficiency and sustained growth as higher female earnings and*

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*bargaining power translate into greater investment in children's education, health and nutrition, which further promotes economic growth in the long run. Hence, Economic empowerment will have larger effect than her counterpart as it promotes prosperity of future generation and finally the prosperity of the country as a whole. Empirical literature around the world has already certified this fact. As per united Kingdom Department for International Development Report (2010), total agricultural output in Africa increased by 20% due to women participation and the number of women owned business in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America were grown rapidly due to women participation and had direct impact on job creation and poverty reduction. Taking cognizance from these experiences, World Economic Forum is working for economic empowerment of women around the globe. This year agenda for Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which was held in Hyderabad in November, 2017 is Women First – Prosperity for all. More than 500 women entrepreneurs around the world participated and deliberated on. Economic empowerment of women is the first step towards their participation in society and politics. Sustainable development could not be achieved without social inclusion and social inequality. It stresses for the fact that means without gender equality and equal access of women in economic development. Existing literature and empirical analysis also affirm the fact that women empowerment will have more effect on the society than the men participation in economic activity. Hence, economic development, sustainable development and overall development of any country are unthinkable without women empowerment.*

### **Women's Economic Empowerment and India's perspective**

*In India, the gender gap in labour force participation rate is more than 50 percentage points. The lower participation of women in economic activities adversely affects the growth potential of the economy. (Economic Survey 2017-18). Women workers are the most disadvantaged in the labour market as they engaged mostly in the low skilled informal worker category, and are engaged in low-productivity and low paying work, further there exist pay parity and earn very low wages, mostly piece rates in highly insecure jobs. India had the largest gender gap in median earnings of full time employees in 2015, in comparison to countries like South Africa, Brazil, and Chile.*

***For the first time, the Economic Survey 2017-18 is printed in pink colour to address gender issues. The Government of India has been taking measures to increase the participation of women in productive economic activities by schemes to provide support services to working women and also through legislative measures to enhance maternity benefits.***

Bridging the gender gaps in education, skill development, employment, earnings and reducing social inequalities prevalent in the society have been recognised as the underlying goals of the development

strategy (Economic Survey 2017-18).. *Economic Survey reiterates the fact gender equality is an inherently multi-dimensional issue. Assessments have been made by three specific dimensions of gender (a) Agency- relates to women's ability to make decisions on reproduction, spending on themselves, spending on their households and their own mobility and health. (b) Attitudes- relates to attitude about violence against women/wives and the ideal number of daughters preferred relative to the ideal number of son and (c ) Outcome- relates to son preference measured by sex ratio of last child , female employment, choice of contraception, education level, age at marriage, age at first birth and physical or sexual violence experienced by women which aims to reflect the status, role and empowerment of women in society.*

*The survey finds that over the last 10-15 years, India's performance improved on 14 out of 17 indicators of women agency, attitudes and outcomes. The survey however cautions that on several other indicators notably employment, use of reversible contraception, and son preference, India has some distance to pass through.*

The **Gender Parity Index (GPI)** has shown improvement at the primary and secondary level of enrolment in India but at the higher level of education disparity still continues. GPI is a valuable indicator which reflects the discrimination against girls in access to educational opportunities intake rate for women in higher education.

**The Financial prudence of Indian women is strongly exhibited through successful Self Help Group and Micro Finance Institutions.** Most of these SHG are instrumental in economic empowerment of poor women especially in rural areas. Government has initiated *Mahila E-Haat*, for promoting the spirit of creating self-employment ventures, an initiative for meeting aspirations and needs of women entrepreneurs has been launched. This provides an e-marketing platform by leveraging technology for showcasing product made/manufactured/sold by women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs.

**The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017** is a step towards economic empowerment of women. The women are entitled to enhanced maternity leave for a period of 26 weeks (6 months) working in registered establishment under any Central or State law is a step towards encouraging more women to engage themselves in the labour force. Further, it is also directed establishments employing 50 or more employees to provide crèche facility, either separately or along with common facilities within a prescribed distance.

## **POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

Second step in Women empowerment after economic empowerment is Political empowerment. This comes mainly from the financial independence. Women's participation in politics is critical to strengthen

women's agencies for building a progressive society with equality of opportunities among all citizens. In this direction, Article 243D (3) of the Constitution of India provides that not less than one third of the total number of seats be reserved for women. Further, Article 243 D (4) of the Constitution of India provides that not less than one third of the total offices of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. As per the report '*Women in Politics 2017 (IPU & UN)*' Lok Sabha had 64 (11.8 percent of 542 MPs) and Rajya Sabha had 27 (11 per cent of 245 MPs) women MPs. As on October 2016, out of the total 4118 MLAs across the country, only 9 per cent were women. Among the State assemblies, the highest percentage of women MLAs were from Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan with 14 per cent followed by Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal with 13 per cent and Punjab with 12 per cent (Women & Men in India – 2016, MoSPI).

In India, between 2010 and 2017 women's share rose 1% point in the Lok Sabha. The political participation of women has been low in India. There are developing countries like Rwanda which has more than 60 per cent women representatives in Parliament in 2017. There are 13.72 lakh elected women representatives (EWRs) in PRIs which constitute 44.2 percent of total elected representatives (ERs) as on December, 2017. Women sarpanchs accounted for 43 percent of total gram panchayats (GPs) across the country, exhibiting active leadership of women in local governments.

#### **Government of India has initiated taken following initiatives for empowerment of women.**

**Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** for the holistic development of children up to 6 years of age and to meet nutritional needs of pregnant women and lactating mothers. The scheme has been universalized with cumulative approval of 7076 projects and 14 lakh Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) including 20,000 Anganwadi on demand. Digitization of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) has already begun in 8 States with ICTs enabled monitoring of the Schemes through smart phones/ Tablets to Anganwadi worker and supervisor. A new web-portal has been created for enabling the MIS data entry by the States/UTs. Initiative to address the micro-nutrient deficiencies among women and children in the country has been taken. In this regard, fortification of food items with essential micro-nutrients has been made mandatory in the Government funded nutrition related schemes.

**Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, in January, 2017 for providing partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentive so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first child. The cash incentive provided would lead to improved health seeking behaviour amongst the PW&LM. The Scheme envisages providing cash incentive amounting to `5,000/- in DBT Mode during pregnancy and lactation. The remaining cash incentive of `1000/- is provided towards

maternity benefit under Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) after institutional delivery so that on an average, an eligible women will get `6,000/-.

**National Nutrition Mission (NNM):** The Government of India has set up National Nutrition Mission (NNM) to monitor, supervise, fix targets and guide the nutrition related interventions across the Ministries. The programme through the targets will strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies.

**Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** PMUY was launched in May 2016, for providing LPG connections to 5 crore women belonging to the BPL families over a period of 3 years from 2016-17. The scheme aims to safeguard the health of women & children by providing them with a clean cooking fuel – LPG, so that they do not have to compromise their health in smoky kitchens or wander in unsafe areas collecting firewood. Since inception, around 3.3 crore LPG connections have already been provided as on 18.01.2018.

*All these schemes provide for healthy women community, which in turn helps them in increasing their economic productivity, thereby their children's empowerment through access to good education and health facilities.*

### **Way Forward and Suggestions:**

As discussed earlier women participation in the labour force is low, resulting in dependence on men, further to exploitation and gender inequalities. Financial/economic freedom only finally brings the gender equality and promotes prosperity of the country.

The following suggestions with international experiences are recommended for economic empowerment of women.

- 1. Securing women's property and land rights:** Women's access to property, land etc helps them to get economically empowered, **land tenure reform in Rwanda to secure land rights and implement inheritance law led to women empowerment.** In india, equal property rights are there in paper in states but not implemented. Need to take up providing inheritance rights to women in a serious note.
- 2. Making markets work better for women.** Poor women in Nepal are exploited and demotivated but **Fair Trade/their participation in small trade activities** has helped women to raise their voices. A Small step towards of economic independence helped them to fight against exploitation.

3. **Promoting Self Help Groupss and Micro Finance Institutions** helped economically empowered women in India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya. Mudra loans to women also helped them to start small business activities in India. Engaging these SHGs and other women organizations in farm and nonfarm activities etc will benefit poor women and helps in eradicating poverty in the country.
4. There is also need to monetize/measure the services /unpaid work of women.
5. **Women Specific Programmes** to protect mother, child and provide nutrition, education etc to women and children, schemes like ICDS, Beeti Bachaaoo Beti Padao have good impact in India. Schemes for encouraging higher education of women, supporting to take up self employment etc need to be promoted on a higher scale.
6. Recognition of need for economically empowering our girl child should start from home. As pointed out by economic survey boy child preference still exists in India. Awareness programmes to promote gender equality may improve the situation. Attitude/behavioral change is necessary for women empowerment.
7. Workplace gender parity and pay parity on the basis of gender need to be tackled

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