

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract

Women empowerment can be achieved through various means, providing girls and women with access to quality education helps empower them by expanding their knowledge, skills, and opportunities for personal and professional development. Ensuring equal access to economic resources, such as employment, credit, land ownership, and entrepreneurship opportunities, allows women to achieve financial independence and contribute to household and community well-being. Implementing laws and policies that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and address issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and equal pay can help empower women and create a more equitable society.

Keyword: Empowerment, Education, Healthcare, Economic Empowerment,

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Introduction:

The term women empowerment has become very popular in recent times. It is an idea that is frequently discussed in various areas of society, including politics, social movements, and business. The true meaning of women's empowerment is complex, but at its core, it refers to the process of giving women the power and resources to take control of their lives and make their own decisions. Empowerment of disadvantaged women includes things like education, health care and economic opportunities, as well as the ability to participate fully in political and social life.

Women empowerment refers to the process of granting women the power to make choices, gain control over their lives, and participate fully in society. This can include access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare, and participation in decision-making processes. Women empowerment can be defined as the process of enabling women to have control over their own lives, exercise their rights, and achieve their full potential in all spheres of society. It involves providing women with equal opportunities, resources, and

support to participate actively in social, economic, political, and cultural activities, ultimately leading to greater gender equality and the advancement of women's rights. Within the framework of democratic governance, laws, development policies, plans and programs aim at the advancement of women in various fields. In recent years, women empowerment has been considered as a major issue in determining the status of women. To protect the rights and legal entitlements of women, the National Commission for Women was established by an Act of Parliament in the year 1990. Improving women's access to healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare, maternal care, and family planning, enhances their overall well-being and enables them to make informed decisions about their health and bodies. Encouraging women's participation in leadership roles and decision-making processes at all levels of society, including in government, business, and community organizations, helps amplify their voices and influence policy outcomes. Raising awareness about gender issues, challenging stereotypes, and advocating for women's rights and

empowerment through campaigns, media, and community mobilization efforts can help drive social change and promote gender equality. Establishing support networks, mentor-ship programs, and safe spaces for women to connect, share experiences, and access guidance and resources can provide valuable support and encouragement in their journey towards empowerment.

Women empowerment initiatives and outcomes:

1) Microfinance programs: Providing access to microloans and financial services to women in rural and marginalized communities enables them to start their own businesses, generate income, and gain financial independence. Organizations like Grameen Bank in Bangladesh have empowered millions of women through microfinance.

2) Girls' education campaigns: Initiatives focused on promoting girls' education, such as the Malala Fund founded by Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, aim to overcome barriers to girls' schooling and empower them through knowledge and skills acquisition.

3) Women's entrepreneurship programs: Programs that offer training, mentor-ship, and resources to women entrepreneurs, such as the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, help women establish and grow their businesses, contributing to economic empowerment and poverty alleviation.

4) Legal reforms: Reforms in laws and policies aimed at protecting women's rights and addressing gender-based discrimination, such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in India following the Nirbhaya case, demonstrate efforts to empower women and improve their access to justice.

5) Leadership and political representation: Initiatives that promote women's leadership and political participation, such as quotas and affirmative action measures, have led to increased representation of women in government and decision-making roles

globally, fostering greater gender equality and empowerment.

6) Healthcare access programs: Programs that improve women's access to healthcare services, such as reproductive healthcare and maternal care initiatives, like the Safe Motherhood Program, empower women by enhancing their health and well-being.

The current status of women empowerment in India:

1) Education: There has been significant progress in improving girls' access to education, with increasing enrollment and literacy rates. However, disparities still exist, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities.

2) Economic empowerment: Women's participation in the workforce has increased over the years, but they continue to face barriers such as wage gaps, limited access to formal employment, and gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

3) Political representation: While there has been some improvement in women's representation in political institutions, including reservations for women in local governance bodies, their representation at higher levels of government remains low.

4) Legal reforms: India has made strides in enacting laws to protect women's rights and address issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. However, implementation and enforcement of these laws remain challenges.

5) Healthcare access: Efforts have been made to improve women's access to healthcare services, particularly maternal and reproductive healthcare. However, disparities in access persist, especially in rural and underserved areas.

6) Gender-based violence: Despite legal and social efforts to address gender-based violence, including campaigns and support services for survivors, incidents of violence against women,

including rape, dowry-related violence, and honor killings, continue to be reported.

7) Social and cultural norms: Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and cultural practices continue to pose obstacles to women's empowerment, influencing issues such as gender roles, decision-making autonomy, and access to resources.

Limitations to women empowerment in India:

1) Gender-based violence: Women in India face high rates of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, dowry-related violence, and trafficking. The prevalence of such violence limits women's ability to fully participate in society and achieve empowerment.

2) Discriminatory social norms: Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and cultural practices perpetuate gender discrimination and restrict women's autonomy and decision-making power in various aspects of their lives, including education, employment, and household matters.

3) Limited access to education: While there has been progress in improving girls' access to education, disparities still exist, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities. Factors such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural norms often hinder girls' access to quality education and limit their opportunities for empowerment.

4) Economic disparities: Women in India continue to face economic disparities, including wage gaps, limited access to formal employment, and unequal opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic participation. Structural barriers such as lack of access to financial resources, land ownership, and property rights further hinder women's economic empowerment.

5) Healthcare challenges: Women in India face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services, particularly maternal and reproductive healthcare. Issues such as inadequate healthcare

infrastructure, lack of awareness, and cultural taboos surrounding women's health contribute to poor health outcomes and limit women's empowerment.

6) Political under-representation: Despite some progress, women remain underrepresented in political institutions and decision-making roles in India. Factors such as patriarchal political systems, limited access to resources and networks, and cultural biases against women's leadership hinder their political empowerment.

7) Legal and policy gaps: While there are laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality and women's rights in India, gaps in implementation, enforcement, and accessibility limit their effectiveness. Women often face barriers in accessing justice, legal aid, and support services in cases of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Conclusion:

Overall, while there have been advancements in various aspects of women empowerment in India, challenges remain in achieving full gender equality and ensuring the comprehensive empowerment of women across all sectors of society. Continued efforts, including policy interventions, awareness campaigns, and community engagement, are essential to address these challenges and promote women's rights and empowerment in India. Women's participation in economic development is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth, reducing poverty, and advancing social progress. Recognizing and addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment, such as gender discrimination, limited access to resources, and unequal opportunities, is crucial for unlocking their full potential and harnessing their contributions to the economy.

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