

Gender Equality: A Key to a Nation's Success

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Abstract - Educated Women play an important role in a country's development. Education is one of the important weapons through which women's empowerment can be made. Women's education is needed for society's development. It is the need through which we can reduce inequality, improve family status and reduce poverty in society. Empowering women has become one of the most important focuses and points of discussion. The purpose of this paper is to explore what are various initiatives taken by United Nation to achieve sustainable development goals. The paper investigated the various considerations which are taken to address human population growth prospects and remove disparity. In this paper, we have discussed various initiatives which have been taken to empower women. In this paper case from ITC is taken wherein various initiatives have been taken to empower women and how they have achieved success is discussed.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education, Gender Equality

I. INTRODUCTION

It has rightly been said that; If you educate a man, you educate an individual, if you educate a woman then you educate a whole family.

UNDP's gender equality strategy provides a roadmap to strengthen gender equality and reduce poverty. It's an initiative that works for sustainable development goals towards the 2030 agenda wherein every person works for poverty removal and achieving peace and sustenance in a unified manner. Gender equality is the basic foundation upon which a nation's development is based. Gaps in gender equality exist in every sector. Attention towards gender equality needs to be paid since it is one of the most important perspectives that need to be considered. Since women constitute half the world's population therefore proper attention needs to be paid to their upgradation part. By investing in sustainable development goals we make an effort for poverty alleviation and future growth. Education is one of the most important tools for empowering women with knowledge, skills, and excellence.

ITC is contributing a lot to the sustainable development goals through its Social Investments Initiative. ITC's Social Investments Initiative is targeted at various groups. One such group in rural communities. ITC's Social Investment Initiatives have impacted 188 districts in 25 States/Union Territories of India. The Company helps rural communities in creating sustainable keys to generate additional income flow. To help Women in particular the company has its

Women Economic Empowerment Programme which is creating over 77,800 sustainable livelihoods for women.

In India, Poor Women in rural communities are the lifeblood of their families as whatever they earn, they spent on their families to improve the quality of their lives. During their earnings process, they face many challenges due to various deprivations such as Poor or no Education, Lack of Skills and training to learn skills, few or no property rights, and obstructive social norms. So, they are left with nothing more than low-paying labor work.

TABLE I FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

| Year | Percentage |
|------|------------|
| 2005 | 31.7 |
| 2010 | 25.68 |
| 2015 | 21.72 |
| 2016 | 21.36 |
| 2017 | 21.03 |
| 2018 | 20.71 |
| 2019 | 20.52 |

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/983020/female-labor-force-participation-rate-india/>

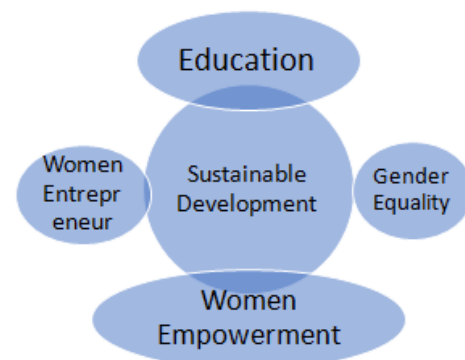


Fig. 1 Gender Equality

Gender Equality is not only a fundamental right but a foundation for a peaceful and sustainable future. Eradicating gender inequality means a place where both men and women enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and a place to live. Investing in gender equality can bring a huge amount of returns and an increase in the annual growth rate at the global level.

A. Strategies to Develop Women Entrepreneurs

1. Encourage women’s participation in decision-making areas.
2. An adequate training program on management skills needs to be added.
3. Better educational training facilities and schemes need to be extended.
4. Skill development needs to be done in training centers.
5. Encourage more women entrepreneurs and more women training programs should be encouraged.
6. Working capital assistance should be provided by financial institutions.
7. Gender Sensitization programs should be held to train financiers and treat women with dignity and respect.
8. More governmental schemes need to be introduced to motivate women entrepreneurs and to engage them in small-scale and large-scale businesses.

TABLE II TRENDS IN WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

| Year | Rural | | Urban | |
|-----------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| 2000-2001 | 28.7 | 54.4 | 14 | 53.1 |
| 2001-02 | 31.4 | 54.6 | 13.9 | 55.3 |
| 2004-05 | 32.7 | 54.6 | 16.6 | 54.9 |
| 2005-06 | 31 | 54.9 | 14.3 | 54 |
| 2009-10 | 26.1 | 54.7 | 13.8 | 54.3 |
| 2011-12 | 24.8 | 54.3 | 14.7 | 54.6 |

Source:-

http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/statistical_publication/social_statistics/WMI7Chapter4.pdf

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005) focused on the effects of SHG on women’s participation and exercising control over decision-making both in family matters and in group activities.

Blumberg (2005) viewed that economic empowerment of women was the key to gender equality and well being of a nation. This would not only enhance women’s capacity for decision-making but also lead to a reduction in corruption, armed conflict, and violence against females in the long run.

Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women’s political participation, legal rights, and education as tools for their empowerment.

Mikkola, A. and Mile, A. C. (2007) identified a relationship between gender equality and economic development. The researcher has covered various issues that are related to gender inequality, value, religion, cultural restrictions, education of a girl, resource allocation, and labour market access. There is a need for active policies it does not start automatically.

Sathiabama (2010) deals with the empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship and the advantages of entrepreneurship among rural women. Economic empowerment of women led to the development of family and community.

Dorius, F. S. and Firebaugh, G. (2010) given study investigate trends in gender inequality. It has been observed that gender inequality is declining across all regions and countries.

H. Subrahmanyam (2011) compares women’s education in India. The author also highlighted that there has good progress in the overall enrolment of girl students in schools.

Duflo, E. (2011) Women’s Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the interrelationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self-sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Doepke, M., Tertilt, M. (2011) Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of noncooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Bayeh, E. (2016) studied the role of empowering women and to achieve this purpose various qualitative methodologies are being employed along with secondary information. Usually, women are highly affected and less emphasis has been given to their protection. The researcher has taken a strong initiative in protecting women’s rights and calls for the sustainable development of a nation.

Dis-empowered women lack membership to agriculture-related Self- Help Groups, ownership of land, and control over incomes but it needs further examination (Soumya Gupta, 2019).

Little is known about how SHGs is an exogenous women empowerment strategy in India and as a successful strategy for Indian women (Agarwal & Mathur, 2019)

Kurzman, C., Dong, W., Gorman, B., Hwang, K., Ryberg, R., Zaidi, B. (2019) in the given survey mentioned the longstanding tension between universal criteria of gender equality and emphasis on women priorities. The mismatch highlights the tension between both of them. In the given paper four empirical aspects of mismatch considering seven global indices of gender equality and women responses were considered.

Gender and equality contribute towards the development of a nation and help in better utilization of available resources and

decision-making. Participation in an SHG increases women's access to information and their participation in some agricultural decisions but has a limited impact on agricultural practices or outcomes, possibly due to financial constraints, social norms, and women's domestic responsibilities. But further studies are required to analyze how SHGs need to go beyond the provision of information to changing the dynamics around women's participation in agriculture to effectively translate knowledge into practice. There is one initiative taken by Azad Foundation for gender justice and women empowerment.

This organization not only trains women in driving skills but also teaches them about their rights and gender equality. During the Covid-19 phase, women faced domestic violence at their places. So, this organization has taken an initiative through the food being delivered and the studies listed above highlight the research gap.

One more justification behind the study is that the present study is made specifically in the context of women entrepreneurs which is how social responsibility with ethical leadership is redefined by women entrepreneurs.

III. ABOUT THE CASE

A. ITC's Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

ITC's Women's Economic Empowerment Programme is targeted at ultra-poor women who are living in Poverty with no regular earnings and are the only earning members of their families. Under this Programme, ITC helps these women to earn independently and thereby make stronger positions in their families and communities.

ITC plans to help poor women in investing in the future of their present and coming generations. To actualize its plan ITC provides training and financial support to these women. Such efforts open various avenues for women such as self-employment activities, self-help groups, small businesses, or micro-enterprises. These avenues help them to earn by polishing their skills. With these earnings, women can provide better education, nutrition, and health to their children along with a gain in confidence with which they break gender inequalities.

B. Strategies Adopted By ITC to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

The strategies adopted by ITC under the Women's Economic Empowerment Programme are as follows:

1. Overcoming financial inadequacy through micro-credit/seed money/loans etc. through Microcredit & Other Self-help Groups (SHGs).
2. Promoting cooperative action & collective enterprises through women-managed Agri-enterprises, Sanitation & other SHGs.

3. Expanding skills & know-how for better opportunities through Training for SHG members & other beneficiaries, exclusive Farmer Field Schools.
4. Special Focus: Supporting Women in Extreme Poverty through Intensive Programmes for achieving financial self-reliance.

C. Nurturing the Saplings of Women Empowerment

Khammam, a district of Telangana has witnessed radical changes in its farming sector. Most of the farmers in this area fit into small and marginal farmers' groups. Indebtedness was the main concern in this society and the problem is to be dealt with to continue the farming culture in this area as many small farmers started migrating from this district. Women also worked as farm laborers in this area to support their family's livelihood. They didn't get work regularly and they were knee-deep in debt. They have to go move from village to village to find work somewhere. Sometimes they find nothing to work on even after wandering from place to place leaving them with no earnings for the day. Life was so hard and struggling for them.

In 2014, ITC's initiative helped these rural women to get out of this struggle and stand on their feet with regular income in their hands to support their families. It was in 2014 when ITC contacted M Kumari and invited her to join other women laborers. ITC discussed with M. Kumari about its plan to start a nursery to grow saplings. She accepted this offer and joined other women laborers to start the nursery. She became the President and Jayamma became the secretary for the same. They worked along with other all-women team members. The Women Cooperative started supplying saplings to the Forestry Plantation of the area. 13 women were provided with training by ITC. The training helped them a lot as they learned how to grow saplings and how to run a nursery.

Apart from getting training, they got a loan from ITC. They invested this money in infrastructure development and targeted to growth of 20 lakhs Eucalyptus saplings in 2015. ITC also supported another 30 women who are 20 km away in Chandrugonda Village, to start a nursery and grow Subabel saplings. They started with the production process in 2014 and targeted 20 lakh saplings.

All of the Women get together fortnightly to discuss the work. In this official gathering, they divide work amongst themselves and also get the wages in their hands. Every woman gets Rs.200 as wages for the day for the contribution of their service to the nursery. They were growing with every subsequent day of their success. They gained confidence and sharpened their capabilities to run the nursery. By this time they have become profitable and able to repay their loans. Annual dividends and their regular earnings enabled them to take off their flight towards success. With ITC's support, to operate the business on a larger scale groups have become Cooperative aided societies which enabled them to sell directly to large buyers. By eliminating the role of middlemen in between they can now earn full profits. They also started

Micro Credit Funds to help the members of the Cooperative. This Micro-Credit Fund provides loans to members of the Cooperative. They grow saplings for forestry plantations but now they are also planning to grow fruits & vegetable saplings shortly as they are getting inquiries from their buyers, particularly for custard apples, cashews, mangoes, etc.

The regular income earned by women laborers from the nursery also helped them to generate alternative sources of their income. One of the women purchased an auto for her husband by taking a loan of Rs.35,000 from the Saving Group. This enabled them to earn more and she also admitted her daughter to Upper KG in a convent school. Another woman set up a small shop to add to their marginal earnings from the nursery. All in all rural women took efforts with the support of ITC and they saw good days leaving behind their old bad days. They also build toilets and improved their houses.

ITC has helped these women by empowering them to take charge of running the nursery and making decisions which helped them to get a strong position in their families too. So, ITC has made various contributions by empowering rural women:

1. ITC has helped women through their involvement in running small businesses. These small businesses created job opportunities. Thus, ITC empowered women financially.
2. ITC also helped to build a better future for their children too. As they are now able to pay school fees for their children.
3. With ITC's initiative, these women have moved from debts to savings.
4. Also, ITC empowered these women by helping them to gain knowledge, build new capabilities, provided the training to impart new skills, and above all market connectivity which is much required to run the nursery.
5. Above all, there is a change in women's minds. ITC makes these women realize the power of women to run the business and also helped to gain confidence in making decisions.

So, ITC has realized the potential of women entrepreneurs from rural society and channelize their potential by empowering them to run a nursery. Thereby the company has helped to achieve one of the important sustainable development goals that are Gender Equality in rural society.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following initiatives need to be taken up by the government to bring sustainable development to the country.

1. Provide education and maintain the health of women in order to bring sustainable development.
2. Protecting the rights of women for their sustainable development.

3. Full utilization of available resources to enhance productivity and economic growth and development of a nation.
4. Active participation of women and ensuring fair representation across different decision-making areas.

V. CONCLUSION

Women play an important role in making a nation progressive. Women's empowerment can change the world. Gender Equality is one of the sustainable development goals of the United Nation and it calls for immediate action. The government needs to work together to set development goals so that the agenda can be set and objectives can be achieved in a precise manner. Gender Equality and the development of women are highly correlated and it helps in the development of the nation. Every nation needs to play a crucial role in protecting the rights of all people at all levels. All countries have to work together let it be developed or developing in ensuring a stable world. Increasing participation of women is important in all spheres and some form of affirmative action helps in transforming society. Women today are active enough to take part in various activities that contribute to the growth of the economy. The concept of women's entrepreneurship needs to be molded along with entrepreneurial traits so that we can meet the changes going on in society and at the same time we can strive for excellence in the given area. To maintain its position at the global level unified efforts are required.

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