



THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN – A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. One of the fundamental aspects of empowerment is equality. If we consider the relational aspect of power, it is the absence of equality among men and women that creates disempowerment of women. According, gender as a social construct assigns different degrees of freedom and equality to women in most societies. Such differences rest on many attributes, including nutrition, education, mortality, wealth, and so on. In this chapter we therefore seek to include equality in the process of development. The status of women in India is interlined with socio-economic and political hierarchies. Since the Vedic times, women have received different status depending on class and caste hierarchies. Education and training are crucial to women's access to technical, administrative, and managerial positions. Several findings suggest that without adequate education and training women have been adversely affected by technological development. Health, housing conditions, and the environment affect a woman's overall ability to live, give birth, and raise healthy children-all essential to empowering women. The CEDAW committee has placed the burden on domestic legal institutions to enforce international women's human rights. Its focus is not on social conflict but on social transformation, on women's capacity to ameliorate discrimination and inequality and on the strategies that they employ.

KEYWORDS : Empowerment, employment, leadership Decision Making, Issue, International law.

INTRODUCTION

Now it can be argued that state policies provide an enabling environment for empowerment when successfully integrated with international and grass-roots initiatives. Our focus will be on national policies, which combine economic and political aspects of development, leading to empowerment of women. [1] This is a case study of India, one of the most enigmatic of developing countries in South Asia. We seek to establish the importance and effectiveness of state policies that seek gender transformation and contribute to the process of empowerment. [2] Our goal in this chapter is to analysis the data that is available now to make an assessment of whether the government has undertaken gender transformative policies and what their impact has been. In other words, we analysis whether such policies have generated greater economic activity, health care opportunities, literacy, and decision- making ability for women-essential aspects of the process of gender empowerment.



CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human and

intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money – and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain ‘power’. According to the Country Report of Government of India, “Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. [3]

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

One of the fundamental aspects of empowerment is equality. If we consider the relational aspect of power, it is the absence of equality among men and women that creates disempowerment of women. Marx’s idea of income distribution leading to inequality in capitalist societies was based on an assessment of the “ability” and “needs” of each. Social theorists have recently expended this and related notions of inequality by including “capabilities” and “functioning”. According to Amartya Sen, “functioning” represent parts of the state of a person-in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leadings a life. [4] The capability of a person reflects that alternative combinations of functioning the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection.” According, gender as a social construct assigns different degrees of freedom and equality to women in most societies. Such differences rest on many attributes, including nutrition, education, mortality, wealth, and so on. In this chapter we therefore seek to include equality in the process of development. More specifically, we focus on the question of whether women in India have become empowered as result of government policies in the following basic areas: women and the economy; women and education; health and environment; and leadership and decision-making. These are also attributes that enables both the rise in capabilities and functioning of women amid challenges of “functioning” as manifest in economic capacity and health, and “capabilities” that accrue from greater power in these areas reinforced by literacy and decision-making abilities.

It is not easy to separate these categories, as empowerment often occurs as a composite of these basic factors in the development process. There are several ways to examine the role of states with regard to human development and gender equality. One can look at specific policies that states make, which affect the status of women. Such policies are in areas such as: family planning, property ownership, women’s education, and the like. These issues, allowing for specific policy evaluation, may be gender neutral, that is, they may not give a true picture of whether women have become empowered as a result of development. [5]Alternatively, one can look specifically at how development policies have affected women. Often, development policies (i.e., policies including structural adjustment, welfare and health care reform, etc.) determine whether or not states are mindful of the effect they have on the status of women. Instead of looking exclusively at of my analysis in this chapter. Instead of looking exclusively at policies, we will also explore policy ramifications in broad areas that reflect development and how women fare in that scenario. India is full of contrasts. It is country that has lagged far behind in growth rates for the most part of its independent history since 1947, India ranks 134th among 173 countries on the HDI. It prides itself as a stable democracy in the developing world but has often ignored the legitimate claims of women. In 1986, for example, under Rajiv Gandhi, one of India’s most liberal prime ministers, a law prohibiting divorced Muslim women from demanding alimony came into effect. This measure was undertaken and sided with by the government to appease rising discontent among fundamentalists with the government. Other than protests from women’s groups and activists, this measure did not see much widespread opposition. In this case, political and electoral considerations became more important than the implications of the policy on Muslim women and their status in society. The consideration was that if Gandhi alienated the fundamentalists, his party would lose Muslim votes. Such policies surely jeopardize women’s empowerment and other government efforts aimed at ensuring gender equality. [6]

WOMEN, THE STATE AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

The status of women in India is interlined with socio-economic and political hierarchies. Since the Vedic times, women have received different status depending on class and caste hierarchies. There are varying accounts about the status of women in the early and later Vedic period; most studies indicate that

there was a gradual decline in the socio-political and economic status of women. [7] Subsequently, the colonial government during British rule was not keen in creating an infrastructure peruse but contributed to several social legislations that positively affected the status of women. Two such examples: widow remarriage was permitted in 1854, and sati, the practice of burning wives along with their deceased husband, was banned in 1859. Even though the British government was instrumental in passing these laws, it alone, by no means, initiated the reforms. Several indigenous leaders and social reformers, VidyaSagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, for example, spearheaded the reforms. Women played an important part in the struggle for national liberation, even though they were not at the forefront of the struggle in large numbers.

Mahatma Gandhi was the first national leader who included and gave women a prominent role in the freedom movement. Gandhi believed that a nation advances as much as its women do.[8] This belief was translated into the new constitution of independent India, which took effect in 1950. Article 15 (3), by emphasizing that the state can make special provision for women and children, created the basis for affirmative action to improve the status of women. Education and women's reproductive health concerns were addressed by subsequent plans, but the gains were not obvious. In 1971, the Committee on the Status of Women was appointed to evaluate the status of women. In 1975, in conjunction with the International Year of the Women, the status of women Committee issued a report on the status of women in independent India. This report highlighted that even though in absolute numbers there were more educated women in India than in the past, women were not adequately represented in the economic sector and in public life. Between 1911 and 1971, women's employment in the organized sector fell from 34.4 per cent to 17.3 per cent. According to the Employment Review of 1972-73, the growth rate in women employees was 9.5 per cent as compared to 5.6% the previous year. Furthermore, there was a "visible link between female poverty and the depressing demographic trends of the declining female-male sex ratio, lower life expectancy, higher infant and maternal mortality, declining work participation, and rising rates of illiteracy and immigration among women. "Subsequent policy evaluations demonstrated that a major problem remained the difficulty of reaching poor women. In 1985, the government introduced the Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resources Development. The department was to oversee the implementation of program's geared toward welfare of women. Since 1992, a monitoring body, the National Commission on Women has been entrusted with promoting and guaranteeing women's rights. Thus, the Government of India was willing to take the necessary policy initiatives in order to empower women. What it lacked at that point was the awareness that the roots of women's inequality were widespread and complex, permeating areas of work, cultural beliefs, education, health, and environment, consequently, structural changes within the policy framework were not sufficient in bringing empowerment to women; a much more entrenched approach was needed. [9]

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT, AND EMPOWERMENT

For a long time, women's work or contribution in the economy was either largely ignored or dismissed, for traditionally women worked in the informal sector and within the household. Women were not considered to be economically active. What is "economic activity"? Is housework an economic activity? There are many ambiguities in the concepts of economic activity-work, job, employment, and so on. Women who participate in household agricultural farms may consider their framework as part of housework.[10] Recently, international organizations such as the United Nations as well as economists have begun to stress the importance of work that contributes to production or has the potential to earn an income or profit as well as production for household consumption.

This constitutes the "economically active" population. Since 1980, women have been entering the labour force in larger numbers. In India, in 1985, the total number of economically active persons was about 315 million. Out of this total 223 million were men and 92 million were women. In 1989-91, 38 per cent of the local population was in the labour force. Recent data from the World Bank show a decline in women's participation in the labour force between 1980 and 1999. Surprisingly, however, whereas in most countries women's economic activity rate has increased, rates in India have steadily declined. In 1950, there was

30.45 per cent female economic activity rate; by 1991, that figure declined to 22.70 per cent.[11] During this same period, the figures in China rose from 47 per cent to almost 54 per cent. Female economic activity rates have increased during this period in most other Asian and Latin American countries, even in Sri Lanka and Cuba. Comparable declines, as in India, are prevalent in African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zaire, and others. The predominant explanation for this discrepancy is mechanization and modernization in the agricultural sector. As factories and mills replaced traditional mores of agricultural production, more and more women lost jobs in the agricultural sector. [12] This is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1970s, this has been the case in most traditional societies and was the focus of Ester Boserup's path breaking analysis of women and economic development in 1970. The impact of such policies notwithstanding, in other areas the government has taken some important steps to alleviate the working conditions of women. Since 1948, the Government of India has initiated several laws to regulate the working hours of women in mines, factories, plantations, and elsewhere. Examples of such policies and regulations include the Factories Act of 1948, the Mines Act of 1952, and the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 (requiring equal pay for equal work and preventing discrimination against women). Although it is necessary to look at government directives and policies that seek to redress the situation, policies alone will not suffice to ensure better working conditions for women or to reinstate displaced female workers. As already discussed, there is a marked discrepancy in the benefits that men and women are receiving as a result of the development process. This discrepancy is rooted in the question of what kinds of work women do. In India, for example, we find that women are predominantly employed in agriculture and in low-paying, low-profile jobs. The situation is not unique to India. It is a global trend, particularly in developing countries. There are deep cultural and social attitudes that assign low status to women's jobs. According to the World Bank, one way that "Public policy can affect household processes and reduce women's dependency is to alter the economic environment. In a sense, this means that market forces should be allowed to influence the boundaries of culturally acceptable women's activity". Although this attitude permeates the fabric of most countries, the inequality is even more prominent in the access to education that men and women have in different societies. [13]

WOMEN, EDUCATION, AND EMPOWERMENT

Education and training are crucial to women's access to technical, administrative, and managerial positions. Several findings suggest that without adequate education and training women have been adversely affected by technological development. Recent findings suggest that more women were literate in 1990 than in 1970. In 1970, forty-three women per 100 men were literate; in 1990, that number rose to fifty-five. These numbers, thought, ought to be evaluated against the background of a continuing gap between male and female literacy rates in the upper and postsecondary levels.[14] Such comparisons are valuable because they present a picture of the decline enrolment of female students in upper levels of education and in technical and postsecondary levels. This means that women will have low-paying, low-skill jobs. In India, the regional variation in literacy rates is also significant. According to a government report, despite an increase in female enrolment in primary schools, there is gross disparity from region to region. There is a discrepancy between northern and southern India. In one district in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the enrolment is only 14 per cent. [15] In the southern state of Kerala, in contrast, the enrolment is 65 per cent. In fact, Kerala is the only state with enrolment rates over 50 per cent. Studies have found that there is a direct link between lack of education and the growth in population rates. In the north, most women still have five or more children, have early marriage, and are subordinate to men. In contrast in the south, the status of women is higher, there is more gender equality, and the birth-rates have fallen significantly. [16]

The state of Kerala, for instance, is not economically advanced, and its women have the same access to family planning services as do others elsewhere in the country. Yet Kerala, where women have long enjoyed high status and where literacy among them approaches 90 per cent, has completed the "demographic transition" to replacement-level birth rate, while most of the rest of India is experiencing the higher birth rates that Kerala experienced 25 years ago. The link between education and population control

is therefore striking. With more education, women learn the value of family planning. Women of Kerala have as much access to birth control as do women from other parts of India. Without adequate literacy, however women from states with low literacy levels are unable to grasp its significance in the context of a burgeoning population. [17] Education women participate in reproductive decision-making and are taken seriously by their spouses. The government's efforts at educating women in family planning and birth control and distribution of contraceptives will therefore be more meaningful in a situation where women have the basic education to understand and appreciate its value. Furthermore, education is directly related to the status of women in general. Once the literacy rates rise, people, especially men, perceive women differently. A women with education enjoys higher status than one without. This helps in areas where men have traditionally perceived the primary role of women as mothers and wives. Education liberates women from their traditional roles. [18]

HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

Health, housing conditions, and the environment affect a woman's overall ability to live, give birth, and raise healthy children-all essential to empowering women. International organizations such as the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund are directing serious attention to the importance of women's health and well-being as an agenda item for policy directives aimed at development. Development analyses in the past scarcely examined women's health issues as a vital part of development. [19] Today, there is a shifting concern. It is crucial that we consider the health of women in the general health and security of the population. Proper nourishment, immunization against deadly diseases, sanitary living conditions-all constitute essential aspects of the development process and contribute to empowering women. As in most other countries-development and developing alike-in India maternal mortality rates, infant mortality rates, and fertility rates are areas of concern in the overall health of women and the population at large. Fertility rates declined from 5.7 per cent to 4.3 per cent between 1970 and 1990. This is still fairly high, especially when we consider comparable data from China to reflect a decline from 6 per cent in 1970 to 2.4 per cent in 1990. China's strict one-child policy may be behind this decline. Such a policy, merits and demerits aside, would not work in India. History has shown that the democratic process in India would challenge such state policies. In the early to mid-1970s, when Indira Gandhi's government tried to implement forced sterilization programmes, there was widespread protest and discontent eventually resulting in the Gandhi government being voted out of office.[20] Given this situation, as well as the need for slower population growth, it is necessary to enhance the role of education as an important policy imperative. As already discussed, and as the data show, in states where women are more literate the population growth rates are lower. Moreover, studies show that women in states with higher literacy rates enjoy higher status. This distinction is marked among southern states in India, where literacy levels and rates are higher than in northern India. In states such as Kerala, with a high literacy rate (almost 90% among women), life expectancy at birth also remains higher than states such as Uttar Pradesh, where literacy rates are below the national average. In addition, traditional cultural beliefs, such as the preference for a male child, need to be addressed. The sex ratio demonstrates a clear cultural preference for boys. In 1981, there were 933 females per 1,000 males; by 1991, that number had declined to 927. According to one estimate, "Of 8,000 abortions in Mumbai after parents learned the sex of the foetus through amniocentesis, only one would have been a boy." It will take more than government policy alone to rid of society of such prejudice in favor of the male child. Perhaps when the benefits of education permeate the social fabric there will be a change in this scenario. [21] It is notable that recent efforts toward sustainable development have brought environmental concerns to the forefront.

As already discussed, only recently have researchers and international organizations begun to consider women's work within the household as economically productive. Furthermore, the literature, especially feminist scholarship, has highlighted that women are constantly facing challenges to environmental deterioration. "Women who manage rural households experience soil erosion, deforestation, and contaminated water supplies directly, because these events impinge on their ability to

provide for their families..... Farming families, for example, experience soil degradation in the form of productivity declines.” Other perspectives contend that women, who are more intricately related to the “earth,” often find ways of expressing the need to refurbish and replenish environmental deterioration “naturally.” Noted environmentalist and ecofeminism critic Vandana Shiva argues that Indian women are capable of re-creating a relationship with the feminine “nature.” This is also witnessed in many rural settings where women have found innovative ways of guarding against environmental degradation and have organized themselves indigenously to protect the environment. Examples include the Chipko movement in the early 1970s, when the “tree-huggers” in northern India—literally by hugging trees—prevented a sporting good company from cutting down trees. To be sure, such approaches and movements, even though strong, sometime fail to assess the deeper complexities in the situation and the role that women have to play. Within the Chipko movement, for example, some women supported one faction that was in favour of limited logging along with development needs for the region.[22] Other cases and situations indicate that Indian women’s status and work atmospheres may be hazardous without them being aware of it. According to one estimate, while cooking, women were inhaling carcinogens and benzopyrene that would have been equivalent to smoking twenty packs of cigarettes a day. In such situations, there is a need for governmental intervention. Women have to make compromises with environmental threats because of economic needs of survival (possibly explaining why some women in the Chipko movement supported limited logging). Or they are unaware and helpless in situations where they are being exposed to lethal fumes while doing household chores.

In either case, the government’s role becomes crucial in addressing environmental issues that stand in the way of empowering women to lead healthy lives. Availability of cooking gas, proper maintenance, and affordability are the major aspects that government intervention could ensure. On the other end of the spectrum is the need for government to ensure that development efforts reach out to areas, both rural and urban.[23] In some regions of India, for example, women still have to spend close to eight hours a week drawing and carrying water. Although the situation is worse in some African countries, comparable data show that women spend 2.5 hours in Nepal and Bangladesh and about an hour a week in Indonesia., Part of the reason this situation persists is that women do not have a strong say in the development priorities that are often drawn up by state and local authorities. Because women continue to be the primary source of labour for household chores and raising children, development efforts that ignore conditions affecting women ought to be reassessed. Notions of sustainable development, therefore, ought to include the well-being and upliftment of women and men in the development process. [24]

LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING AND EMPOWERMENT:

So far, we have discussed the need for the government to play a more proactive role in making gender transformative policies and in ensuring that the fruits of development reach all women. Coupled with grassroots participation and activism, this can go a long way toward empowering women. An essential aspect of this process is women’s participation in decision-making, both within the community and in formal administration at the local, regional, and national levels. [25] The global disparity in gender representation in public life is alarming. In 1990, women headed only 3.8 per cent of the UN member states. In ninety-three of the 159 member states as of 1990, women held no ministerial positions. Even though India has had a women head of government, overall women’s participation in government is still dismal. In 1975, women occupied only 4.3 per cent of the seats in both houses of parliament. This was lower than the global standards of 12 per cent in the lower house and 9.8 per cent in the upper house. As of 2000, women held 8.9 per cent of the parliamentary seats in India. It is difficult to assess where India falls in this criterion, as there is wide variation globally: in Sweden, women hold 42.7 per cent of the parliamentary seats; in China, 21.8 per cent; in the United States, 12.5 per cent; and in Pakistan, 2 per cent. It is true that numbers alone will not indicate that states will adopt more gender-sensitive policies. But if more women hold leadership positions in local, state, and national governments, the perception of women as decision-makers will change favorably. In Pakistan, for example, under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, there was a social acceptance to

women providing leadership in public policy. A similar situation is witnessed in Sri Lanka and Turkey. [26] There are several other reasons why there are prospects for more women's participation in India. Political participation by women is not rare in Indian history, dating back to ancient times. In modern India, many prominent women were at the forefront in the struggle for Indian independence. Even though India's female former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, cannot be credited with ushering in a wave of gender-sensitive policies, her contribution to raising the self-esteem of millions of poor women, as well as policies toward poverty alleviation, were significant. More ever, recent efforts by the government to address the issue of women's participation in the political process contribute to the empowerment process contribute to the empowerment process directly. This includes the passage of the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992, introducing a phased self-government system for the villages. This is called the Panchayati Raj Institution system. The new amendment calls for a reservation of one-third of the seats in the Panchayati (local village government unit) for women, including reservation for scheduled castes and tribes. By making it easier for women to be a part of the formal administrative system, the government is playing a proactive role in the empowerment process. Representation in local self-government will eventually lead to a gendered perspective on issues and policies. Another step toward affirmative action by the government to include more women in the policy process is the proposed legislation to reserve 33 per cent of parliamentary seats for women. [27]

This bill, originally introduced in 1996 has yet to pass Other examples include the leadership provided by the self-Employed Women's Association, the All India Women's Conference, the Working Women's Forum, Maitree (an umbrella organization coordinating the activities of various agencies working to support women in cases of domestic violence and other abuses of women's rights in Kolkata), and other organizations. [28]

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND INTERNATIONAL LAW:

The CEDAW Committee has placed the burden on domestic legal institutions to enforce international women's human rights. Under CEDAW, an individual must first exhaust domestic remedies before coming forward in an international human rights court. National courts must remedy women's rights violations by their use of international women's human rights law. In the words of one member of the Human Rights Committee, the state is given "an opportunity to redress, by its own means within the frame work of its domestic legal system, the wrongs alleged to have been suffered by the individual." Each of the signatory states are to report on an annual basis to CEDAW's Committee on Women on the progress as laid out by CEDAW in their country.[29] One shortcoming is that most states have not met their annual reporting requirements to the Committee. Another weakness is that the time required to review the annual reports by the Committee on Women is a period of two weeks annually, which is too short for the purpose of reviewing all of the country reports on women. International law has indicated that states are to be held responsible for violations of discrimination performed by private individuals as well as for acts performed by public officials. Regrettably, the United Nations has concluded that women's rights, despite the rhetoric, have regressed in some instances, as the external social pressures on women brought on by physical displacement by wars, famines, and ecological disasters have made them more vulnerable to violence. In practical terms, then, the legal changes brought about by women's rights have been implemented by women themselves. The result has been to change the focus of women from being "invisible" victims of persecution to being granted recognition as a group.[30] The special Reporter on Women to the UN Commission on Human Rights has issued a series of reports on violence against women in different parts of the world, including South Africa, Brazil, and Haiti, among others. The Rapporteur's reports have outlined the extent of the problems facing women, which include rape and sexual violence, trafficking and forced prostitution, violence against migrant workers, violence against women, reproductive health, and child pornography. The Rapporteur has urged member states to undergo criminal justice reform to create special cells for handling cases sensitive to the needs of women. The criminal justice system should show "due diligence" to prevent violence against women and work closely with health, social services, and education

practitioners. Legal reform is necessary with the help of nongovernmental organizations to use UN model strategies to prevent violence against women in the home and in society. [31]The European Commission on Human Rights has stated that the state has a positive obligation to provide adequate protection for women against gender-based violence and harassment. In a significant use of the new law, eight Serbs were charged and convicted of crimes against humanity and grave breaches of international law for the gang rape, torture, and sexual enslavement of Muslim women in Focus. [32]

ISSUES

A first issue deals with outcomes: Who achieves empowerment? In What way and to what extent? Does the process create a new kind of hierarchy among women? Does empowerment disproportionately benefit women of the elite, those with advanced education and international experience? These are inconvenient questions, but they point to meaningful realities. There is no reason for a priori assumptions that empowerment will foster egalitarian communities or democratic procedures. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to anticipate that, especially in its early stages, empowerment would be partial and selective which raises the question of who might be the new power wielders. Further, it suggests the possibility that selective empowerment could exacerbate rather than mitigate social divisions according to education, race, ethnicity, or religion-and thus intensify differences among women. We are especially concerned that it might accentuate inequalities of socio-economic class. Taking a somewhat different but related tack, Anna Yeatman has expressed concern that empowerment as idiom and process might reproduce the traditional hierarchy between the powerful protector (the state, the elite) and the powerless (i.e., women, children, and the poor), who are seen as helpless, passive, and needy. [33] For her the concept has patronizing quality; she instead proposes use of the term “empowering,” which is interchangeable with capacitating or enabling. A third issue concerns the apparent tension between traditional concepts of “power over” and alternative notions of “power to.” Is this a real or false dichotomy? At first glance, “power” to looks like a qualitatively different sort of idea. It is more concerned with process than with subjugation, more focused on outcome than on domination. It implies a positive-sum world in which one women’s gain does not necessarily come at the expense of another man’s (or woman’s) loss. Its goal is not to step on anyone; it is to secure social change. Its focus is not on social conflict but on social transformation, on women’s capacity to ameliorate discrimination and inequality and on the strategies that they employ. [34]

CONCLUSION:

This discussion has shown that the Indian government, as in most other states, advocates equality irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on. The constitution of India enshrines these principles. Central and local governments are also directed against discrimination on the basis of sex in their hiring processes. Yet there is gross disparity in gender representation in public offices and in administrative and entrepreneurial positions. This is not to suggest that empowerment has not occurred at all. Some of the empowerment has occurred as a result of activism by women’s groups and trade unions. India is an enormous country with a tremendous degree of regional variations in socio-economic and cultural processes. Thus, some of the national level discussed here may not truly capture the vicissitudes of the complexity and differential trends that are otherwise manifest. For instance, the notion of more governance is changing the face of villages in India and including more and more women in the bargaining process. To make such efforts more meaningful at the national level, the government has to be at the forefront, providing the resources for the transformation to happen. There are fundamental aspects such as education, in which the government’s efforts can lead to an “enabling” process, which would then generate empowerment. As the case of Kerala has shown, education enables women to exercise more power and decision-making authority within the family structure. With more strict enforcement of literacy programmes, perhaps the rest of India can also feel the “trickle up” effect of this southern state. All this shows that empowerment in India will have to incorporate all the levels-international, national, and sub-national. The government alone has not and cannot generate empowerment. Gender-sensitive policies

need to be reinforced by other agencies. In order for policies to have any net effect on empowerment women, there has to be a concerted effort involving the government, NGOs, women's groups, men, and the overall cultural perception of the need to empower women.

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