



"THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN — A CRUCIAL ISSUE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT"

Dr. V. Vijay Sarthi

Principal, S.P. College, Pulgaon, Dist. Wardha.

ABSTRACT :

The present research paper is aimed at empowering women in Rural areas through income generating activities. It is an integrated approach to train and develop women co-operatives and self-help groups encompassing "Rural Dairy, Garment making and manufacturing of Food Products " as prime activities. According to an estimate, women represent 50% of population, make up 30% of the official labour force, perform 60% of all working hours, receive 10% of the world income but still own less than 1% of the world property. This is the lawful economic profile of women in the world. This is also true of Indian women and very much true of rural women.

KEYWORDS : *empowering women , world property , evil conditions.*

INTRODUCTION

Rural women in our country suffer from evil conditions both economically and socially which are invisible. Economic invisibility stems from the perception that women are not relevant to the wage and self-employment. But, they have been playing very important and significant role. They are engaged in a variety of occupations: small farm agriculture, live stock tending, processing of live stock produce, gathering and processing of agricultural and minor forest produce, tree growing, small trading and vending , producing manufactured items such as garments, bidis, shoes, food stuff etc. Still there is continued vulnerability and inequality in all sectors such as economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. There is a need to empower these women to counter this menace while strengthening women's economic security. The growing realization of this fact induced several development agencies to contribute their might in this direction and initiated several development approaches. The world conference of the UN Decade for women defined development as the tares development including development in the politics, social, culture and growth of the human person. They opined the women's development should not be viewed as an issue in social development but should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development. Out of several approaches prescribed for empowerment of these women, the "Economic empowerment approach" which focuses on improving women's control over material resources and strengthening women's



economic security is considered as an important approach. Here in this approach groups are formed using two methods; organizing women's around savings and credit, income generation, skill training activities or organizing them by occupation or location. These groups may work in a range of areas including savings and credit, training and skill development, harnessing rural resources, new technologies or marketing as well

as provide such ancillary support such as, child care, health, literacy and legal aid.

WOMEN DEVELOPMENT — CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN:

Social suffering and victimization of women is a result of the general status of second class citizens usually accorded to women. It is not surprising that development programmes which do not take into account the aspirations and participation of women are not effective in achieving their objectives. The growing realization that rural women are not inarticulate, illiterate and ignorant objects of welfare, but are in fact, productive, hard working adults, who have coped with battle for survival from a very young age, makes their participation in the development process increasing necessary and imperative. The condition or material state in which poor women live is characterized by low wages, poor nutrition, lack of access to health care, education and training emphasis on improving the daily conditions of women's existence curtailed women's awareness of , and readiness to act against the less visible but powerful underlying structures of subordination and inequality. While receiving material benefits, women should not be deprived of their urge to achieve a better role, their will power to reach a higher quality of life and their commitment to an enhanced status in the family, community and society. But, poverty is known to have driven countless women to low status, low paying occupations in domestic services or organized prostitution frequently as migrant way from their homes at times across international borders exposing them to considerable risk of economic exploitation and sexual abuse. In material terms also women and girl children in ultra- poor families are the worst sufferers, as the distribution of family resources under patriarchal system tends to be skewed against them.

It is known fact that majority of women live in rural areas, urban slums and majority of women workers are engaged in subsistence agriculture and informal sector with little or no regulation, legislative protection and trade union support. The down scaling of public sector, budgetary restraints and privatization effected women adversely, particularly through the reduction of subsidized welfare services. Rapid technological advances are likely to affect poor women by devaluing their traditional, skills thus jeopardizing their survival strategies and pushing them into extreme poverty.

There is also increasing evidence of women entering home based sub- contract work, which almost denies them protection under labour laws and isolates them from fellow workers thereby reducing opportunities to organize themselves. At times, women have suffered a disproportionate reduction in labour, market opportunities under economic reforms especially in economics under transition. The vast majority of women work in self- employment outside the agriculture in low paying trade and service activities. The major difficulty encountered by women in self- employment activities relates to access to credit market and technical skills. Customary laws and conventions in our country preclude women from claiming family assets.

A considerable amount of abuse and harassment of women also takes place within the family. The phenomenon of violence in the home is common and is not only confined to poor and illiterate families as it is often presumed. In some communities female children have been known to be systematically condemned to pervasive neglect.

The incidence of unwanted pregnancies is still very high suggesting among other factors, inadequate access of women to education about reproductive choices, family planning services or lack of control over their reproductive roles in an unequal sexual partnership. Excessive workload, malnutrition, repeated pregnancies, poor education and health facilities mars the lives of majority of women particularly those who are poor.

Women have been playing very important and significant role in both urban and rural areas. We see that both in the organized and unorganized sectors of economy, be it agriculture, industry or services, women have been contributing substantially and yet very often their contribution goes unnoticed by both the family and society. Their work remains mostly invisible.

Poor women are engaged in a variety of occupations ; small farms, agriculture, live, stock trading, processing of live stock produce, gathering and processing of fruit produce, tree growing, small trading and vending ; producing manufactured items such as garments, bidis, shoes, food stuff etc. They also provide manual labourers in fields, at construction sites, in factories and work-sheds and providing services such as domestic labour, washing, cleaning , transportation and child care etc. yet their contribution is hardly identified.

These are a few areas of concern which can serve as beam light for the policy makers to evolve a number of interventions for their development.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN — STRATEGIES & APPROACH:

Need of empowerment:

There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors-economics, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life.

Components of women empowerment:

Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality; collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group.

Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organize, manage and carry out income generation activities for overall development.

Participation and greater control and decision making power in the home, community and society.

Action to bring about greater equality between men and women.

The required qualities of empowered women:-

Empowered women define attitudes, values and behaviors in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing make hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern, industrial societies.

Empowered women maintain equal mindedness rather than act out roles that merely confront and challenge male dominance. Empowered women do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equals and cooperate in order to work towards the common good.

Empowered women use their talents to live fulfilling their lives. They have not only survived the harshness of their own subjugation, but they have also transcended their subjugation thus moving themselves through survival to fulfillment. Empowered women, maintain their strength in the presence of pressures of family, religion, work and they contribute towards empowerment of all women.

TENETS OF EMPOWERMENT:

a) Collectivization:

Bringing a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity is an important part of the strategy towards their empowerment. The coming together of poor women provides them an identity which is different from other identities and helps to highlight their worker role. It also provides them a sense of belonging in a totally different power equation that is mutuality. Both of these are empowering experiences in themselves. For providing support to each other, the group of women can meet periodically and there is a reference available for each group of women. For bargaining and negotiating activities like bulk buying, selling, acquisition, credit and other facilities necessary for economic activities and in this regard collectivization is an excellent instrument. This collectivization also brings in the possibility of pooling and sharing resources, skills, time frames, space and other facilities. Pooling is an important way of strengthening the capacities of the poor women to work together and develop a sense of strength.

b) Capacity building:

Once women start coming together, the next step is to enhance their capacity to work as a group and play different roles, necessary for development and maintenance of group. Capacity building of women in the areas of planning, executing and monitoring of all aspects of economic activities are equally desired in this context.

c) Ownership and control:

Once women starts acquiring the capacity to work as a group, planning, executing and monitoring the activities, the issue of taking control over the whole activity becomes critical. So managing different components apart from operational aspects of activity like record keeping, accounts, handling cash, being signatory to bank accounts etc., are helpful in building this control.

d) Mediation:

Strengthening their capacities to mediate with outside world, markets, financial institutions, competitors, suppliers, host of policy makers and other important segments of external environment.

CATEGORIES OF EMPOWERMENT:

- Empowerment for marginalized group.
- Process oriented nature of empowerment.
- Holistic nature of empowerment:
- Empowerment for dealing with strategic rather than practical gender interests.
- Cognitive, psychological and economic components of empowerment.
- Empowerment for democratization.
- Empowerment for understanding the native character of literacy that empower.
- Context specific nature of empowerment.
- Empowerment for sustainability.

The required Approaches:

a) Economic empowerment approach:

It focuses on improving women's control over material resources and strengthening women's economic security. Groups are formed using these methods;

- (i) Organising women around savings and credit, income generation, skill training activities.
- (ii) Occupation or location-These groups may work in a range of areas including savings and credit, training and skill development, new technologies or marketing as well as provide such ancillary supports as child care, health services, literacy, legal education and aid.

b) Consciousness raising approach:

In this approach education is central and defined as a process of learning that leads to a new consciousness, self esteem, societies and gender analysis and access to skills and information. In this approach, the group themselves determine their priorities. Women's knowledge of their own bodies, reproduction are also considered vital.

CONCLUSION:

The economic empowerment approach with the four strategies of interventions ; i.e., collectivization, capacity building, ownership and control, mediation, will be adopted in this project. Identification of women, motivation and formulation of self help groups, including the habit of the savings

and credit, formation of women co- operative, selection of income generation activities like dairy, garment making and food processing contribute exceptionally well for the women empowerment that inturn reflects in the overall Rural Development. Further , the women groups have to be identified, motivated and their capacities are appropriately enhanced / strengthened through suitable training methodology and the strengthened might be motivated to take up an economic/ income generation activity suiting to the local environment / resource of our Rural India.

REFERENCES

- Richard Baldwin, "Economic Geography and Public Policy", (Mexico, 2005).
- Wesley D. Seitz, Economics of Resources, Agriculture and Food", (NewYork,2003).
- Praveen K. Jadhav, "Environmental Economics Today: Issues and Perspectives", (New Delhi, 2008).
- Jean Dreze, "India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity", (London,2009).
- E.A. Ramaswamy, "Managing Human Resources: A Contemporary Text", (Hyderabad, 2008).