

Women as Change Agents & Pillar to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Sustainable development is conceptualized on three interrelated pillars of profit, people and planet representing economic growth, social development and environment sustainability. This paper is concerned with the people development taking the feminist part of development as the main pillar. The central theme of the paper is to explore the various perspectives of women empowerment including gender equality in various areas including decision making, education, labour participation, wage pay rates etc. leading to sustainable development.

This paper is divided into III sections. Section I explains the conceptual part and the relation between women development and sustainable development. Second section represents the data related to the various aspects of women empowerment. And the last section is concerned with finding out the process to do the same and also highlights some suggestion based on the study.

Keywords: women empowerment, sustainable development, gender equality

SECTION-I

Introduction

Development is the central theme for every nation during all the time periods. Fundamental question before the developed and developing nations is to achieve sustainable development, which could be achieved only by "investing in people" first. Sustainable development, which has three Ps of Profit, People and Planet, cannot be achieved without long term investment in economic, human and environment capital. Among these investing in human capital come first.

But women, who make up almost half of the world's population, is not fully valued and utilized all over the world in general and specially in India. This paper stresses that sustainable development will always remain a question mark without women development.

Background

Underinvestment in women capital is one of the important reasons for unrealized dream of sustainable development.

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs as per World Commission on Environment and Development.

Empowerment can be defined as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important” (Page and Czuba, 1999). The discussion about women’s empowerment in this paper is held against the backdrop of women’s continued disadvantage compared to men. This disadvantage is apparent in the different spheres of economic, socio-cultural and political life in all societies across world. Empowerment in this context means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. As such, it can be conceptualized as an important process in reaching gender equality. Gender equality is understood to mean that the “rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female”. The paper is supported by the following studies:-

Sunita, Srija & Vijay (2015) pointed out the causes for decline in rural female labour participation in India. Among all the arguments, income effect, education effect and the problem of underestimation, what is left unnoticed is the structural transformation of the economy and its resultant impact on the female labour market in the whole process. With an increase in income levels of the households, a woman no longer prefers working as an unpaid worker or a helper or as a casual worker unless the work is remunerative. However, such opportunities are limited in rural India and as a result women are not finding jobs matching their preference (regular part-time jobs close to their households). Furthermore, with low skill levels, jobs in the non-farm sector are also limited. These factors perhaps have led to the withdrawal of women from the labour force.

WORLD SURVEY ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT (2014) addresses the topic of “GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”. It explores that the twin challenges of building pathways to sustainable development and achieving gender equality have never been more pressing. As the world moves towards the post-2015 development agenda, the present World Survey not only shows why each challenge is so important, but also why both challenges must be addressed together, in ways that fully realize the human rights of women and girls and help countries to make the transition to sustainable development.

Rahul & Hema (2013) examined that how economic growth and labor force participation in India are related. Their result suggest that growth by itself is not sufficient to increase women’s economic activity, but the dynamics of growth matter. These findings are especially important to help design policies to improve women’s labour force participation rate so that India can take complete advantage of its upcoming demographic dividend.

Maelan & Nkiru (2011) highlights the role played by females towards achieving a sustainable development in the global community. They analysed the effect of urbanization and lack of crèche facilities in work places which takes a toll on the number of females available to build a virile and sustainable local, national and global scientific community.

OCED report (2008). This report is a contribution by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and its cross-cutting work on gender. It aims to increase understanding of the role of women in maintaining the three pillars – economic, social and environmental – of sustainable development. The data pertain primarily to the situation of women in OECD countries, but the insights and policy implications are applicable to all countries. The report illustrates how gender mainstreaming in statistics, studies and statutes can lead to more sustainable government policies and a better world economy.

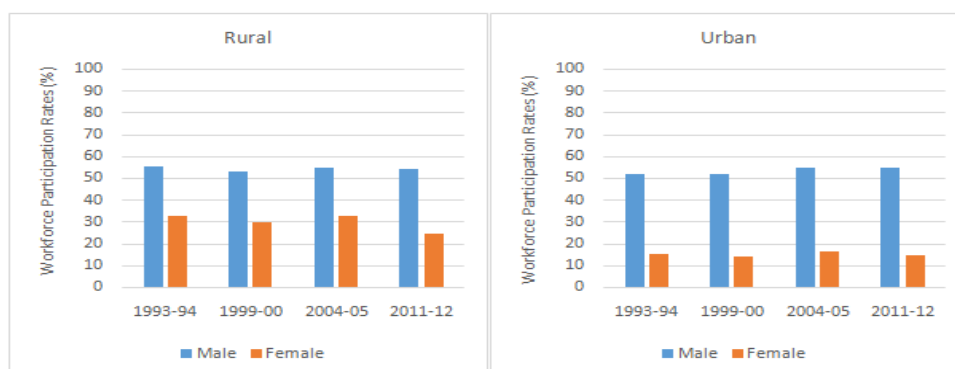
Surjit & Ravinder (2005) presents some facts about labour force participation in India and found that female education has a positive effect on LFPR. Each year of education adds about 0.6 percentage points to the participation rate. There has been some speculation that the low level of LFPR in India is due to discrimination against women in the workplace. They receive lower wages, and often do not get entry into “paid” jobs. There is additional discrimination against the economically backward communities like the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes who together account for a quarter of the population. But once women enter the labour force, the evidence of that discrimination is very small. This is one of the major findings of the paper.

SECTION-II

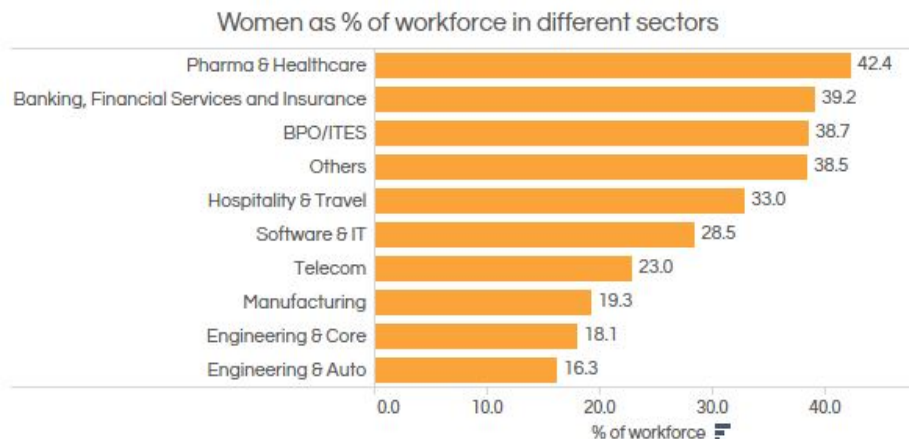
Main Thrust of the Paper

This section of the paper includes various aspects of female perspective to be taken care of for the purpose of sustainable development. These aspects are as under:

- (A) **Employment Rate:** Compared to other countries which are at similar levels of development, Indian women tend not to participate as much in wage employment. The WPR for women above 15 years of age in India was a little below 30% in 2011, significantly below the world average of around 50%, according to World Bank estimates. In comparison, Brazil and China were at 60% and 67% for the same age group. The female WPR is especially low in urban areas and has remained close to 15% over two decades, as Figure 1 shows. Meanwhile, the female WPR in rural areas has varied between 25% and 30% in the same time period. In contrast, urban male participation rate is 53%, according to 2011 National Sample Survey Organisation data (NSSO).

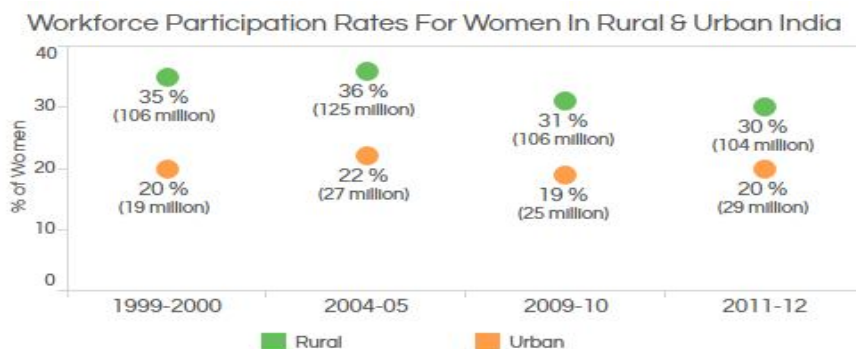


Source: Employment and Unemployment Survey, NSSO (various rounds)



Source: Confederation of Indian Industry

- (B) **Gender Composition of workers:** In spite of the fact that women constitutes for 48.29 percent of population (Census 2011), their participation in workforce is only 22.5 percent. International Labour Organization (ILO) ranks India at 121st among 131 countries as far as female labour force participation is concerned. These are even poorer in government sector.



Source: National Sample Survey Organisation (68th Round 2011-12)

- (C) **Gender Pay Gap:** Wage differentials with men influence incentives to work. As in many other BRICS, participation also is influenced by the large wage differential that women face in India, especially among unskilled workers. Literate man will earn nearly twice as much as a woman with similar skills. The difference decrease somewhat with education, especially in services.
- (D) **Education level of Females:** Globally, about 565 million women are illiterate, mainly in poor rural areas. Fritschel and Mohan (2001) reports that the failure to educate these women when they were girls' may be due to factors ranging from the need for girls' labour in the home, attitudes that devalue education for girls, fears about girls' security outside the home, and lack of resources to pay for education. There is a U-shaped relationship between education and labor force participation rates of women. With increasing education, labor force participation rates for women first start to decline and then pick up among highly-educated women (particularly university graduates), who experience the pull factor of higher-paying white-collar jobs. The gender gap in education in India still remains but has been narrowing over time (right text chart below). As the gender gap in education closes further,

particularly at higher education levels, female labor force participation rates can be expected to rise. In addition to raising labor input, the resulting human capital accumulation should boost potential output.

Future Trends

Future researches in this area can be dedicated to find out answers to the questions of what is to be done and is being done so far for women's empowerment both through building and enabling structures of policies and through enhancing women's capacity as an active agent of change for sustainable development in India.

Finding out differences in rural and urban parts of India w.r.t. labour participation and programmes of women empowerment.

SECTION-III

Process of Empowerment: Women empowerment is a long term process. On the basis of different studies in this field the following steps should be followed to bring all round development of females.

- Identify the existing gaps
- Women voice- listen to them
- Creation of enabling environment
- Building capabilities

Conclusion

Today's women have more rights and opportunities than their preceding generations but it's a long term project. In the perspective of sustainable development, it is necessary to continue to strengthen the foundations of sustainable & equitable opportunities for the female fraternity to help them to actively participate as agents of change and sustainable development. Some findings are:

- There is a great need of an integrated and holistic approach towards economic, social and environmental concerns.
- From sustainable development perspective, it is imperative not to consider women empowerment as a social-cultural issue but to give it due consideration in the economic and environmental realms as well as treating gender equality as a cross cutting objective.
- An all-round approach and efforts are required to identify relative knowledge and awareness gap to acknowledge inequalities and monitor them.
- Women empowerment process needs to be taken forward jointly by all stakeholders including government, the corporate sector and civil society.

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8. Business Standard

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I bow my head in front of Almighty who gave me all the strength and courage to think and work.