



GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: *Women in India represent 29 percent of the labour force, down from 35 percent in 2004. More than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected. Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leaders. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India. Women are also shut out of the formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use, and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets to their name. It is unsurprising then that at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women's contribution to the GDP than the global average of 37 percent. In addition, women face great physical insecurity. The rate of crimes against women in India stands at 53.9 percent in India. In Delhi, the capital city, 92 percent of women reported having experienced sexual or physical violence in public spaces. The paper tries to scrutinize the challenges and opportunities involved in the economic impact of achieving gender equality in India which is estimated to be US\$700 billion of added GDP by 2025.*

Keywords: *Empowerment, Gender Equality, GDP.*

Introduction: The twentieth century gave rise to profound changes in traditional sex roles. However, the force of this rising tide has varied among rich and poor societies around the globe, as well as among younger and older generations. Rising Tide sets out to understand how modernization has changed cultural attitudes towards gender equality and to analyze the political consequences of this process. The core argument suggests that women and men's lives have been altered in a two-stage modernization process consisting of (i) the shift from agrarian to industrialized societies and (ii) the move from industrial towards post industrial societies. This paper discusses the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG), on gender equality and women's empowerment. It explores the concept of

women's empowerment and highlights ways in which the indicators associated with this Goal - on education, employment, and political participation - can contribute to it. In 1994 the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) funded a one-year study to consider educational reforms and gender equality in schools in England and Wales in the period 1984-94, in particular, assessing whether the various educational changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s had strengthened or interrupted trends towards greater gender equality. The research had a threefold aim: to map student examination performance in terms of gender over a ten-year period; to evaluate the impact of government reforms on gender equality in schools; and to ascertain any noticeable changes in student and/or school cultures, and in



equal opportunities policy-making. The historical point at which the research was carried out (1984-94) followed, first, a period of equal opportunities activity in education which reached its height in the mid-1980s, in which local education authorities (LEAs) took a major role; and second, a period of considerable educational change. Such reforms were instigated by central government reforms which encouraged greater central control over schools, as well as choice, competition and the introduction of educational markets, through self-managing schools and new school provision. International consensus on education priorities accords an important place to achieving gender justice in the educational sphere. Both the Dakar 'Education for All' goals and the Millennium Development goals emphasize two goals, in this regard. These two goals are distinguished as gender parity goals [achieving equal participation of girls and boys in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-groups in the population] and gender equality goals [ensuring educational equality between boys and girls]. In turn these have been characterized as quantitative/numerical and qualitative goals respectively. In order to consider progress towards both types of goal, both quantitative and qualitative assessments need to be made of the nature of progress towards gender equality. Achieving gender parity is just one step towards gender equality in and through education. An education system with equal numbers of boys and girls participating, who may progress evenly through the system, may not in fact be based on gender equality. Following Wilson (Human Rights: Promoting gender equality in and through education. Background paper for EFA

GMR 2003/4, 2003) a consideration of gender equality in education therefore needs to be understood as the right to education [access and participation], as well as rights within education [gender-aware educational environments, processes, and outcomes], and rights through education [meaningful education outcomes that link education equality with wider processes of gender justice]. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. And economic empowerment is also a right. There is no quick fix: women's economic empowerment takes sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment from all development actors. Donors can also increase their investment. Worldwide, only about one in two women work, compared with three in four men. In some low-income countries, such as Zimbabwe and Madagascar, the labor force participation rate for women has reached 90 percent, but these women are often under employed. Hard economic circumstances often force them to be self-employed or work in small enterprises that are unregulated and unregistered. About 83 percent of all domestic workers in the world are women, most of whom work in precarious conditions. Women



also do much more unpaid work than men, including caring for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities; contributing to family farms or businesses; and performing household chores such as collecting water or gathering firewood. Improving women's livelihoods constitutes basic human rights protection. But could including more women in the labor force also stimulate economic growth, enhance business competitiveness, and improve well found that reducing the gender pay gap and equalizing access to economic opportunities and resources are good for economic, social, and business development. For example, some firms that purposefully reduced gender discrimination and supported family-friendly policies attracted more talented workers, improved retention rates, and decreased employee stress, resulting in enhanced productivity. But women face significant barriers to improving their lives, such as fear of victimization and violence, lack of child care, and legal and informal discrimination. Removing those barriers could help draw women into higher-productivity sectors and improve family, community, and national prosperity.

The Challenge: Women in India represent 29 percent of the labour force, down from 35 percent in 2004. More than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected. Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leaders. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India. Women are also shut out of the formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets

to their name. It is unsurprising then that at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women's contribution to the GDP than the global average of 37 percent. In addition, women face great physical insecurity. The rate of crimes against women in India stands at 53.9 percent in India. In Delhi, the capital city, 92 percent of women reported having experienced sexual or physical violence in public spaces.

The Opportunity: The economic impact of achieving gender equality in India is estimated to be US\$700 billion of added GDP by 2025. The IMF estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27 percent. More than half of India's women don't have cell phones, and 80 percent don't use them to connect them to the internet. If as many women as men had phones it could create US\$17 billion in revenue for phone companies in the next 5 years. Globally, women make or influence 80 percent of buying decisions and control US\$20 trillion in spending. There are also social benefits to empowering women. Women spend 90 percent of their income on their families, and economically empowered women boost demand, have healthier and better-educated children, and raise human development levels. One in three private sector leaders reported that profits increased as a result of efforts to empower women in emerging markets. The Government of India's MUDRA scheme to support micro and small enterprises and direct benefit transfers under the Jan Dhan Yojana seeks to empower women. Women entrepreneurs account for about 78 percent of the total number of borrowers under MUDRA.

Potential Areas of Focus: The private sector and business community will be crucial in helping bridge the gap between



skills and jobs and enable access to decent work for women. Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities cannot be undertaken in a meaningful way without the involvement of industry. Companies can also invest in women entrepreneurs through microfinance, and bring their goods and services into supply chains. Enhancing women's access to the internet and ICT can create a merging market of connected women who can be linked to business opportunities. In addition, as employers, the private sector can invest in women's security against violence at home and in public spaces, and take steps to ensure their mobility through inclusive transport. We found evidence that broad-based and gender-specific policies can enable women's economic empowerment; that is, improving women's ability to make decisions and affect outcomes important to themselves and their families. Here are six of those policies.

Broad-Based Policies:

1. Promote Economic Growth: In countries experiencing rapid economic growth, increasing demand for labor and the availability of better-paying jobs ensures that women's economic empowerment does not become a zero-sum game between men and women. When the economy demands more workers, women will not replace men if more women participate in the labor market.

2. Invest in Public Services, Infrastructure, And Women-Friendly Public Spaces and Transportation: The quality of and access to public services, including basic utilities such as water and sanitation, improves all-around well-being through greater economic productivity and growth, but

may be especially beneficial for women. For example, because women do most household work, electricity and tap water can free up their time, enabling greater labor market participation. Access to speedy and reliable transportation can reduce safety concerns that discourage women from entering the labor force or limit them to working at home.

3. Promote Innovation and Technology: Information and communications technology can help increase women's inclusion in the economy, particularly in high-productivity service sectors. Greater access to information and technology can also stimulate changes in social norms and attitudes toward women's roles in society, potentially improving access to education and political involvement. Gender-specific policies

4. Provide Child Care: Evidence suggests that the availability of child care is strongly associated with an increase in women's labor force participation and productivity. Child care, particularly high-quality child care, is one of the most important enablers of women's economic empowerment and can have a positive impact on children's learning.

5. Change Laws That Limit Women's Economic Independence: Reforming inheritance and family law to lift prohibitions on daughters' legacies and to reduce husbands' power over wives' economic activity can have positive economic effects, going beyond the specific outcomes they are intended to address.

6. Improve or Reduce Work in The Informal Sector: Women are concentrated in the informal sector, which includes jobs that are unregulated and insecure, like street vending. Policies designed to move workers from the informal sector to the formal sector can



significantly benefit women. Working in the formal economy is more likely to empower women because it is associated with more control over their own incomes than they would have in informal work. Evidence suggests that strengthening the collective bargaining capacity of women workers in this sector and improving awareness of women's rights is important to ensuring that income levels and working conditions improve in the formal economy.

Enacting these policies will not only empower women, but will also benefit their familiar and communities. The United Nations' recently formed high-level panel on women's economic empowerment will bring needed attentions to these issues and, we hope, begin to bring about needed change.

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