

GENDER SENSITIVITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Article

ABSTRACT

Gender sensitivity is one of the most important means of empowering women with the ability to recognize issues and problems in the way societies look at gender. It enhances women to acquire knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. In language and the humanities, gender sensitivity often gets expressed through people's language choice. For centuries, many words referring to all people were specifically masculine. But men and women are living with interpersonal relationship; the relations, roles, attitudes and practices are clearly differentiated in terms of societal values. This study helps to enhance one's own capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one's community in economic, social and political terms. Gender sensitivity and women empowerment have various components but this study comprises: culture and gender; women education and development; gender mainstreaming; gender budgeting; gender and violence; women's low participation in technological education; women in the labour force; labour force and legislation; women in politics; women democratization; women rights and gender equality; democracy and empowerment; women empowerment and nation building.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal, social, economical, political, legal and cultural empowerment created by time. Gender responsibility helps to generate respect from the individual regardless of sex. Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. On the contrary, education that is gender sensitive benefits members of both sexes. It helps them determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. Gender awareness requires not only intellectual effort but also sensitivity and open-mindedness. It opens up the widest possible development for both men and women. This study enhances everyone to know about gender sensitivity.

CONCEPT OF GENDER SENSITIVITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Gender Sensitivity is the ability to recognize issues and problems in the way society looks at gender. It particularly looks at how women act and are treated and the different ways that women understand their roles. It includes an understanding of stereotypes and how discrimination and gender roles hurt people, both in the past and today. To put it in simple terms, it is not judging

and refraining from being/sounding sexist, just like most people try to avoid being racist (Aashna Prakash, 2011).

Gender sensitivity is the act of being sensitive to the ways people think about gender, so that people rely less on assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of men and women. For centuries, many words referring to all people were specifically masculine. Terms like "man," and "mankind," exclude females. This societal view in extreme forms is detrimental and corresponds to discrimination and even, arguably, things like greater violence against women (UGPOA, 2009 – 2011).

Women Empowerment

- Empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging their own subordination.
- Similarly, "women empowerment," "gender equality" and "gender equity" are separate but closely related concepts.

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Empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights (Oxfam, 1995).

The process of gaining access and developing one's capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one's own life and that of one's community in economic, social and political terms.

CULTURE AND GENDER

Drawing on diverse case studies from the United States, Africa, Latin America, and Asia, Dorothy Hodgson's anthology *Gender and Culture at the Limit of Rights* seeks to expose many of the assumptions and implications underlying the current clamor for "women's rights also human rights." (Dorothy L. Hodgson, 2011). When we look into sex ratio in India, it has been proved by the findings of 2011 census that the birth rate of women is diminishing. Current population study of India shows the following;

Current Population of India 2012		
Population (2011 Census)	Density (per km ²)	Sex ratio
1,210,193,422	382	940

WOMEN EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The past decade has witnessed a significant increase in the importance accorded to education, with both "instrumental" as well as "intrinsic" arguments made for increasing financial investment and policy attention to education provision. Investing in education is seen as one of the fundamental ways in which nation states and their citizens can move toward long-term development goals and improve both social and economic standards of living. The education of women in particular is seen as providing the key to securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and providing the substance of long-term gender equality and social change.

Literacy Rate in India as per Census 2011		
Literacy Rate	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
74.04 percent	82.14 percent	65.46 percent

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

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Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (UN, 1997). Gender mainstreaming requires an equal representation of women and men in decision-making institutions (Lombardo, 2005). Every effort is to be made to broaden women's participation at all levels of decision-making (Charlesworth, 2005).

GENDER BUDGETING

Gender budgeting is a tool for women empowerment. The starting point would logically be looking at the constituents of "women empowerment". These are defined in the Tenth Plan document quoted as below:

- Social Empowerment _ to create an enabling environment through various affirmative development policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potentials.
- Economic Empowerment _ to ensure provision to training, employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant.
- Gender Justice – to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus, allow women to enjoy not only the de-jure but also the de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz. political, economic, social, civil, cultural, etc. (Suguna Reddy B, 2011).

GENDER AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Recent assessment of the progress in mainstreaming gender indicates significant gains. The popularization of women's issues through various forms sponsored by the GAD officers and advocates raised gender awareness among UP constituents. This sensitivity is reflected in the active engagements of students and faculty in public debates on issues relating to reproductive health and women's rights.

But despite the significant gains in the integration of women and gender issues in the university's programs and projects, there is still a need to move forward, especially in terms of curricular reform and institutionalizing gender-sensitive practices and gender advocacy. At the organizational level, we have to review policies on hiring, promotion and appointment to ensure that our practices uphold the principles of equity and non-discrimination. Proactive measures must be in place to prevent sexual harassment and promote a violence-free campus. Women-friendly services such as child-minding centers should be established in all campuses. These child centers will be a venue for non-sexist socialization. Anti-sexual harassment advocacy must be regularly integrated in the student's activities and in the National Service Training Program (NSTP) (Rhodora Masilang-Bucoy, 2012).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION

This assertion may not be true anymore with the age of automation and revolution in computer technology, intellectual ability count more than physical energy (Amar-Kehinde, 1999); and it is through constant practice of problem solving that the higher cognitive skills needed in science and technology will develop, not through physical strength. Beverly (1995) notes that the society assumes that women should be mothers, school teachers, hairdressers, secretaries, nurses, maids and social workers only; therefore, they do not need education or training in calculus, physics, chemistry, auto-mechanism or welding. Mohammed (2001) is of the view that although men and women are biologically different, they are much more like each other than popular culture would often have us to believe. There is low rate of enrolment of girls compared to boys in science and technology fields in tertiary institutions.

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

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- In 2009-2010, women were 26.1% of all rural workers, and 13.8% of all urban workers. (Indiastat.com).
- Women are an estimated 31.2% of all economically active individuals (ILO, 2009)
- Women earn 62% of men's salary for equal work (WEF, 2011)
- 26.2% of women compared to 9.0% of men cited a lack of role models as a barrier to advancement (Deepali, et.al., 2010).

LABOUR FORCE TRENDS AND LEGISLATION

- In an effort to recruit more women employees, some companies are offering 25% bonuses for female employee referrals. http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-labour-force-india-footnote22_tjrrhe3 (Express India, 2008).
- India ranked towards the bottom of the 134 countries, with a ranking of 113, on the 2011 Global Gender Gap Index. (WEF, 2011)
- Women received 12 weeks paid maternity leave. (WEF, 2011)
- India has a young workforce and population. In the next ten years, with both younger people and women entering the workforce, India expects to add an additional 110 million people to its labour force. (Deccan Herald, 2010)
- In the next 40 years, India is projected to add 424 million working-age adults (CSIS, 2011)

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Politics is the art and science of government and it is a global activity, and there is hardly any society in which we do not have politics in one way or the other (Oni, 2001). The consequences are that women involved in politics have tended to accommodate issues and policies of specific concerns to women and by extension to the majority in civil society (Oni, 2001).

WOMEN DEMOCRATISATION

- The realisation and determination of the will to change things around, and the empowerment of women, or rather the seizure of power by them to determine their own orientation and to restructure their own life styles in accordance with their self determined world view (Adesanya, 2001).
- Raising the level of cultural, social and political consciousness of women through programmes of enlightenment that liberate than domesticate.
- Opening of access to, and acquisition and use of knowledge through programmes of enlightenment that liberate than domesticate.
- Opening of access to, and acquisition and use of knowledge through universalised functional literacy for both young and old, and multi-variety of non-formal education programmes for their social, economic and political capacitation (Akinpelu, 1988).

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

NCG has substantial competence on women's rights and gender equality and is working on gender issues for major international clients within the framework of UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), OECD DAC Gender Guidelines, new aid modalities and comprehensive international policy on poverty alleviation and empowerment of women. The fields of expertise are policy development and elaboration of strategies, planning and programme design, gender mainstreaming methodology, results based management, sector-wide approaches, studies and evaluations. Assignments cover country gender profiles, women's human rights, MDGs, women and girls' education, maternal and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, women and conflict related to UNSCR 1325 Women Peace and Security, Gender and Governance, women's economic participation in productive and agricultural sectors, women entrepreneurs, pastoralism, cultural affairs, humanitarian affairs and operations, and Gender and Climate Change (NCG, 2010).

DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character, rational conduct and active participation in government; an intelligent understanding of public affairs; independent judgment; tolerance and unselfish devotion to public interest and it is the excellence of individual character. Democracy encourages the intelligence, self-reliance, initiative and social sense of free men by planning the ultimate authority and trust and ensures equal consideration for all (Appadorai, 1978).

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND NATION BUILDING

Aristotle, the father of Political Science said that state is a "union of families and villages". Family is the basic unit of society, which is the foundation of state itself. Happy families create a healthy society and healthy society is a pre-requisite of strong political order in democratic societies. A woman is an architect of society. She establishes the institution of family life, builds the home, brings up the children and makes them good citizens. Her strength in totality contributes to the making of an ideal family, ideal society and an ideal state (Paramjit Kaur, 2007).

It should be noted that education of women has resulted in the changing patterns of life style and women participation in all spheres of national life promotes women's interests in society and consequently in nation building. It is pertinent that government on its part should always consider appointment of women with requisite qualification(s), experience and positive social disposition into position of responsibility (Oni, 2000). Hence, strategies for women empowerment could be psychological strategy, sociological strategy, educational strategy, economic strategy and political strategy (Oni, 2000). Akinpelu (1988) is of the view that whatever strategy is adopted, the indigenous knowledge familiar to the groups must be adequately utilised in any democratisation policy for women. It will be hypocritical and self deceptive to expect that men and male dominated governments will willingly emancipate women from their cultural subordination, economic exploitation and political invisibility.

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