
ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Women empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. Historically, women in both Eastern and Western societies were viewed as the weaker sex and this view placed women in the company of a lesser being. Even today women in most of the world are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical and sexual; abuse and less paid. Till date the literature on development the specific role of women had been largely ignored, particularly the question of how development affects women's subordinate position in most societies. In fact the integration of women into our labour force has meant less dependence on men, because that these women can take over jobs, there is less dependence. The integration of women has also widened the intellectual pool in social, political and economic debate. Not to mention that the appointment of women in administrative posts has shattered myths that the domain of politics and leadership in public sphere is purely for men.

INTRODUCTION

They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have pre-professional or technical education. Should they attempt to enter the workplace and political life they face greater obstacles from family members, discrimination in hiring, and sexual harassment. In many nations women are not full equals under law. Often burdened with the full responsibility for housework and child care, they lack opportunities for entertainment and imagination. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities. But in only 37 years as a nation, we have shattered myths about what is and is not permissible or achievable for Indian women. Today, we have high percentage of women, female industrialists, mentors, ministers and judges. We also have the increasing rate of female university graduates in the world.

If we are to work successfully with the problem of women and economic development, of preparing women to take their place in the employment market, "glass ceiling," work and family balance, the feminization of poverty and women in a learning society.

PAY EQUITY

According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the developing world, women grow up to 80 percent of all food produced, but rarely hold the title to the land they cultivate, Worldwide, they constitute one third of the wage-labour force. Much of their work, however, is unpaid, among a wide range of other activities, Women also dominate the informal sector of the economy – and this work is not usually reflected in economic statistics. If global calculations of the gross domestic product included household work, the amount would increase by 25 percent and would be generally greater than that of men.

It is also clear that women work much longer hours than men. In developing countries, women's work hours exceed men's by 30 percent but within each occupation, male fulltime employees receive higher incomes

than female fulltime employees. Why is it so difficult to overcome this wage gap? One of the reasons is our long habits of thinking of women and the work they do is of less importance.

In addition up to 90 percent of part-time workers are women. This has short-term benefits that it increases the number of jobs that can be handled along with household responsibilities, whereas, has long-term disadvantages, however, including reduced job security, retaining opportunities and workplace benefits such as pensions and health insurance.

Male unemployment and underemployment have put even more pressure on women to take on the role of bread-winner. Men are increasingly unable to support their families alone.

In Canada, France, Sweden, The United states, Italy, The Netherlands and Spain the percentage of prime working-age men without jobs has increased. Working mothers, who reconcile work out-side the home while retaining primary responsibilities for child care and others duties, shoulder a heavy burden, particularly as their families grow. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including increasing levels of migration and high levels of marital dissolution, as well as the growing number of children born to single mothers. Excessive drug and alcohol used by males, multiple unions and polygamous households add to the economic hardship faced by women, since men may not have sufficient resources to support multiples families.

Evidence from Philippines shows that with each additional young child, a mother's workload increases by an average of 8.4 hours per week.

Because women are more likely to spend their earnings on their families basic needs, their income tends to have more positive effects on family well-being. A study in South India found that while women kept barely any income for their exclusive personal use, men kept up to 26 percent.

Despite their key economic roles, women occupy a very small minority of decision making positions in the economic arena. In most countries, they make up just 10 to 30 percent of managers in the privates sector, and occupy less than 5 percent of the very highest positions. They are also under represented in the trade union movement.

GLASS CEILING

Existing economic structures are dominated by men and pose major obstacles to women's advancement that prevent women from rising professionally regardless of their education and experience is still impermeable today.

These structures include networks and achievement criteria based on perceptions and stereotypical expectations of men compared to women. Glass ceiling is an apt label for the phenomenon faced by women who aspire to positions of leadership. The proportion of women who have made it into high leadership positions is stunningly small (Swoboda, 1995).

A recent study of executives in one multi-national corporation showed that the women who had reached this level faced a second glass ceiling (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). These women made the same pay and received the same bonuses as their male counterparts. However, they managed fewer people, were given fewer stock options, and obtained fewer overseas assignments than the men did. Being in the same position does not necessarily imply having the same level of status in the organization. Clearly, they had gotten the message that they had moved up as far as they could in their company whereas the men were more likely to see new opportunities ahead.

WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE

Studies show that, in most of the world, women spend more hours per week working than men do. However, for women, a larger proportion of time spent working is devoted to unpaid work i.e. housework, childcare, cooking, laundry, housecleaning, ironing, gardening and carrying water and wood and other domestic activities that are not counted when economists try to quantify work. In most countries, women spend about twice the amount of time doing unpaid work as men do in Japan that is nine times. Even women who are employed full time do most of the domestic work in their households (United Nations, 1995).

Women's total work time per week is 53 hours in Bangladesh, 69 in India and 77 in Nepal as compared to men's work time in these countries of 46, 56 and 57 hours respectively. There is one remarkable similarity among countries, the role played by fathers in child care- they do it for, on average, less than one hour per day! Chinese fathers spent the most time in daily child care that is 0.9 hours per day (Owens, 1995). For many women, the reality is a great lack of support and a continuous struggle to make and maintain arrangements for childcare. Moreover, a large chunk of their already smaller than men's income, often goes to pay for this childcare. And the responsibility for solving these problems falls disproportionately on women, even in couples where both members have equally demanding professional careers.

THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

According to some estimates, approximately 70% of the world's poor are women. This generated distribution of poverty shows that there are more poor households that are headed by women than by men and there are more women than men in the poorest households.

In developed countries, studies reported by the United Nations (United Nations, 1995) suggest that there are three factors that are very relevant to the feminization of poverty- strong family ties, employment opportunities for women, and a strong system of social welfare.

WOMEN IN A LEARNING SOCIETY

Years ago, women who insisted on access to higher education, was considered unreasonable in many countries (Peiffer, 1991). American educator Edward Clarke argued in the second half of the 19th century that women's brains were relatively undeveloped and unsuited to the intellectual rigors of higher education and that if women used too much of their energy to think, it might rob energy from their vital reproductive organs and render them infertile. In many countries, women make up no more than 20% to 30% of undergraduate students, and in still others their participation is extremely low. The most recent data, released by the American Association of University Professors last month, show that the percentage of women faculty has increased to 33.8%. However, more than one-half of these women are in the lowest faculty ranks, and just 18.7% of full professors are women (More women are professors, 1999).

The greatest problem may be, however, that female students (and faculty too) are still heavily concentrated, within the universities, in disciplines that are traditionally feminine.

And, while there are some signs that the gender gap is narrowing somewhat in some of the sciences and mathematics, it appears that it may be widening in technology and computer science education.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, it is clear that the stress of balancing job and family can be reduced and the rewards increased, by the availability of high-quality day care and certain kinds of flexibility in workplace itself which is often in rather short supply.

The "glass ceiling," an invisible but impassable barrier against women in the workplace must be removed through a forward-looking economic policy. Women's roles in the economy are critical to family survival and to economic development. Existing policies that place constraints on women must be changed. Women must have equal access to credit, property and markets, and should not require the consent of a male family member in order to secure this access, policy changes must also be made, which place greater value on women's roles within the family which ensure that men take equal responsibility for their children and household tasks.

Clearly, one thing that can be done to reduce the threat of poverty for women is to position them so that they can earn a decent income. That means providing social and cultural support for women who are trying to manage between jobs and family responsibilities.

And it means educating and providing technical training to women in ways that allow them to enter the employment market with reasonable income and advancement.

We have to find ways to help young women envision themselves as engineers, computer scientists, political leaders, business executives, biotechnologists, university presidents and also as electricians, precision metalworkers and other skilled, high-paying jobs in the trades sector. We must recognize that this is essential, not only for women but for society as a whole.

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