

An overview on Women Empowerment: Challenges and prospects

Abstract

Enhancing women's social, economic, political, and legal authority to guarantee equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life is the goal of the multifaceted notion of women empowerment. This overview examines the global history, present state, and potential futures of women's empowerment. It explores the historical background, tracking the movement's origins and emphasising significant turning points in the path to gender equality. The review highlights important obstacles that impede the advancement of women's empowerment, including cultural norms, economic impediments, and political resistance, by examining worldwide trends and regional variances. It also covers how international institutions and policies—like the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations—affect the advancement of gender equality. Additionally, case studies of effective empowerment programmes are included in the study to show how focused interventions can result in profound transformation. This analysis concludes by highlighting the significance of a comprehensive and inclusive strategy for women's empowerment and by promoting ongoing efforts at the individual, group, and institutional levels to build a more just and equitable society for all.

Key Words- Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In its broadest definition, empowerment is the state of having more "power" for a person or group. In contrast, power refers to having authority over and access to material, intellectual, and ideological resources (Batliwala 1994). Inside the context of development, it encompasses both "external" shifts in social position and fundamental power dynamics in society, as well as "internal" changes inside a person's sense of self-determination (MkNelly and McCord, 2001). According to Rowlands (1995) and Mayoux (2000), empowerment has a stronger direct relationship to power. According to discussions on the topic, empowerment is a process that gives people control over the things that limit their options and prevent them from making

decisions that would improve their quality of life (Ravallion and Shaohua, 2001; Nussubaum, 2000 and Sen 1999). Bennett (2002) defined empowerment as the process of strengthening the capacities and assets of various individuals and groups to actively engage, exert influence, and hold institutions that impact them accountable. Chen (1992) defined empowerment as "control over resources and ideology (Batliwala, 1994)." Resources, attitudes, connections, and power were the primary components of empowerment. Women's rights are violated in our culture since men receive most of the wealth and empowerment. The current situation must be changed, and women must be given more influence. Many thinkers and writers have examined various notions of women's empowerment in this context (Malhotra et al. 2002; United Nations 2001; Mayoux, 1997; Rowlands, 1997; Karl, 1995; Young 1993; Friedmann, 1992). Friedmann (1992) distinguished between four types of power: political, social, psychological, and economic in his examination of women's empowerment. Our mission is to bring about institutional, societal, and policy change that will enhance the lives of women and girls worldwide Adick (1995).

Economic power is the ability to make decisions about economic matters and to obtain resources such as markets, food, income, and assets. Access to certain bases of individual production, such as money, information, knowledge, skills, and involvement in social groups, is referred to as social power. Political power is defined as a household member's ability to participate in the decision-making process, especially when it comes to matters that directly impact their own destiny. Psychological power refers to a person's perception of power, which is exhibited by self-assured behaviour and self-worth. Three primary determinants of empowerment were established by Kumar and Sreedhara (2004) in relation to these four types of power: general, economic, and social empowerment. However, Fayyaz (2002) separated women's empowerment into three groups: political, social, and economic. The process through which women expand their choices and take charge of their life is known as women's empowerment. Thus, women's capacity to be economically self-sufficient and self-reliant, with control over decisions affecting their life options and freedom from violence, is strengthened by the process of developing the ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability has previously been denied (Kabeer, 2001). (Rao and Kelleher, 1995). Women's empowerment can occur at a hierarchy of different levels, including individual, household, community, and societal, according to ESCAP (2003). It is facilitated by removing barriers to women's empowerment, such as a lack of resources and skills, and by exposing them to new activities that can build their capacities. Two crucial procedures have been noted as crucial for

empowerment in this setting. The first is social mobilisation and collective agency as impoverished women frequently lack the fundamental skills and self-assurance necessary to confront and overcome barriers and injustices that now exist against them. Change agents are frequently required to intentionally spark social mobilisation. Second, economic security must go hand in hand with and enhance the process of social mobilisation. The disadvantaged will not be able to mobilise if they experience economic hardship and unstable livelihoods (UNDP, 2001). An observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality (Nayak). As far as the rights of inheritance are concerned, women generally do not try to inherit land left by their parents if brothers are alive (Seth, 2001).

International Organisations and Policies' Contribution to the Advancement of Gender Equality

International organisations and laws are essential to the global growth of women's empowerment and gender equality. These organisations give normative frameworks, direction, and assistance to nations that aim to improve the status of women in a variety of domains. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, especially Goal 5, which aspires to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, are among the most important international frameworks.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations

Adopted in 2015, the SDGs signify a global pledge to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee prosperity for everyone by 2030. With an emphasis on eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, guaranteeing equal participation and leadership opportunities, and granting universal access to sexual and reproductive health, Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality. In order to achieve the other goals, gender equality is recognised as a critical component of the SDGs, which emphasise an integrated approach.

Influence on Law and Policy

The SDGs' provision of a precise set of goals and metrics for gauging progress has had an impact on national policies and laws. Nations are urged to match these objectives with their development plans, which leads to the enactment of laws and policies that take gender equality

into account. For example, numerous countries have enacted legal changes to combat gender-based violence, advance wage parity, and protect women's property and inheritance rights.

Women's Empowerment: Obstacles and Opportunities

A key component of global development is women's empowerment, which aims to increase women's agency, opportunity, and participation in a variety of life domains. Even with the tremendous advancements, there are still many obstacles standing in the way of gender equality's complete realisation. This section examines the main issues pertaining to women's empowerment and provides solutions and approaches for resolving them.

Challenges

1. Society and Cultural Norms

Gender inequality is largely sustained by cultural and societal standards. Women's roles are sometimes limited to household duties in many nations due to ingrained customs and beliefs that prevent them from pursuing higher education, finding work, or participating in politics. These deeply rooted conventions have the potential to cause discriminatory behaviours including early marriage, violence against women, and a lack of authority for decision-making in families and communities by Waghmode, R. H., & Kalyan, J. L. (2014).

2. Economic Barriers

One of the main obstacles to women's empowerment is economic inequality. Inequalities in income, work prospects, and access to financial resources are commonplace for women. They are disproportionately employed in low-wage, informal jobs, and are less likely to be credit-worthy or property owners. Gender pay discrepancies and a lack of support for female entrepreneurs exacerbate these economic disadvantages.

3. Representation in Politics

Globally, women are still underrepresented in positions of political leadership and decision-making. The proportion of women serving in municipal and national legislatures is nonetheless low, notwithstanding modest advancements. Due to this underrepresentation, gender biases in governance institutions are maintained and women's impact on policy-making processes is restricted.

4. Education and Skills Gap

A key component of women's empowerment is access to education, although many girls and women still encounter obstacles to it globally. Lower enrolment and completion rates for girls can be attributed to several factors, including poverty, early marriage, and cultural views towards girls' education. Furthermore, there is still a gender disparity in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines, which limits women's access to well-paying and prominent professions.

5. Rights to Health and Reproduction

Reproductive rights and women's health are essential elements of empowerment. But many women do not have access to family planning and other high-quality healthcare services, including those for mothers. Women's physical and emotional health are also negatively impacted by gender-based violence, which includes harmful practices like female genital mutilation and sexual abuse by Waghamode, R. H., & Kalyan, J. L. (2014).

Prospects

1. Legal and Policy Reforms

Reforms in law and policy are necessary to alleviate gender disparity. Important first measures include passing and upholding legislation that supports gender equality, defends the rights of women, and outlaws' discriminatory acts. Equal pay, paid time off, and access to reasonably priced childcare are all policies that can greatly increase women's economic empowerment and involvement.

2. Education and Skill Development

Putting money into women's and girls' education and skill development is a great way to empower them. Providing equal access to high-quality education, particularly postsecondary education, and career training, can help women take advantage of new opportunities. Bridging the skills gap and advancing economic empowerment can also be achieved by encouraging women to pursue jobs in STEM industries and advocating for gender equality in these fields.

3. Programmes for Economic Empowerment

Financial hurdles can be surmounted with the aid of economic empowerment programmes that emphasise women's entrepreneurship, loan availability, and financial literacy. Important tactics for achieving economic empowerment include supporting women-owned enterprises, advocating for gender-sensitive employment laws, and guaranteeing equitable access to opportunities and resources.

4. Raising Involvement in Politics

Encouraging women to participate in politics is essential to attaining gender equality. Women's representation in positions of political leadership and decision-making can be ensured by the implementation of quotas and other affirmative action policies. More inclusive and gender-sensitive governance can also be achieved by promoting female candidates and encouraging women to participate in political processes.

5. Campaigns for Advocacy and Awareness

Campaigns for awareness and advocacy are essential in dismantling societal and cultural practices that support gender inequity. These initiatives can inspire communities to act against discriminatory behaviours, increase understanding of women's rights, and foster good attitudes towards gender equality. Including boys and men in these initiatives is also crucial to building an inclusive society.

CONCLUSION

The journey towards women's empowerment is a complex and ongoing process that requires multifaceted approaches, commitment from all societal sectors, and sustained efforts. This review has highlighted the historical progression, current state, and future prospects of women's empowerment, emphasizing the crucial role of international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals in shaping national policies and driving global progress. The analysis underscores that while significant strides have been made, persistent challenges such as cultural norms, economic barriers, political underrepresentation, educational gaps, and health inequities continue to impede the full realization of gender equality.

To overcome these obstacles, a comprehensive and inclusive strategy is imperative. Legal and policy reforms must be enacted and enforced to protect women's rights and promote gender equality. Investing in education and skill development for women and girls is essential for unlocking their potential and ensuring their active participation in all sectors. Economic empowerment programs, political engagement initiatives, and awareness campaigns are critical in dismantling systemic barriers and fostering an environment where women can thrive.

The case studies of successful empowerment programs included in this review illustrate that targeted interventions can lead to significant transformations. These examples serve as models for replicating and scaling up effective strategies to enhance women's social, economic, political, and legal authority.

Ultimately, the goal of women's empowerment is not only to achieve gender equality but also to build a more just and equitable society for all. It requires ongoing efforts at individual, group, and institutional levels, fostering a collective commitment to creating a world where women have equal opportunities and are empowered to make decisions that affect their lives. By addressing the multifaceted nature of empowerment and promoting sustained actions, we can pave the way for a future where gender equality is a lived reality, benefiting women and society as a whole.

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