

India's gender equity journey: Access to resources

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■ **ABSTRACT :** In India rural women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro-social forestry and fishery etc. They act as farm producers, wage earners, and care takers of the family. With so much of contribution by women in on farm and off farm activities it is unfortunate that power, authority, decision-making and access to resources issues seem to rest exclusively with the males and eventually women acquired a role slowly, which lost its dignity, respect and values. Unequal access to resources limits women's capacity to ensure agricultural productivity, security life hoods and food security and is increasingly linked to poverty, migration, urbanization and increased risk of violence. Women's access to all financial services, including savings, insurance and remittance transfers and credit, is essential to allow them to benefit fully from economic opportunities.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Gender equity, Resources

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From long back in India it was believed that the different properties, duties and status accorded to men and women in a society are fixed by sex, that they are natural and therefore not changeable. Gender is a matter which is seen closely related to the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. In our society boys are always encouraged to be strong, tough and outgoing; but girls are considered just as opposite and encouraged to be home bound-and shy (Prahitha, 2013).

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society particularly in rural area. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education and political involvement. Women are

commonly married young, quickly become mothers, and are then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. They are frequently malnourished since women typically are the last member of a household to eat and the last to receive medical attention. Additionally only 54 per cent of Indian women are literate as compared to 76 per cent of men. Women receive little schooling, and suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws. These laws prevent women from accumulating substantial financial assets, making it difficult for women to establish their own security and autonomy.

Gender inequality is not only prevailing in the house but outside also. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Gender inequality has adverse

impact on development goals as reduces economic growth. It hampers the overall well being because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society (Kaswan, 2013).

In a latest United Nations development Program's Human Development Report, 2013 reports a picture on this front. According to this report India stood at 132nd position out of 187 countries on the gender inequality Index-performing worse than even Pakistan (123). The condition is such that India is far behind than all nations in south Asia. Gender inequality Index is a very good way of showing a country's real picture in terms of gender biasing.

The key points which put India on such a low position are :

- Skewed sex ratio, with only 914 females very 10000 males due to female foeticide.
- Only 29 per cent of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were a part of the country's labour force compared to 80.7 per cent men.
- According to report, education and health status of women in India; only 26.6 per cent women above 25 years received a secondary education in 2010, compared to 50.4 per cent men.
- Maternal mortality ratio in India, 200 women died every 100,000 childbirths (UNDP, 2013).

In a good front overall, India has made significant economic progress, but as a fact improvements are slow on the human development front. On the human development index, India ranks 136th out of 187 countries mentioned in the study. In India, huge income disparities, gender inequality and the caste divide remain major issues.

Women participation in management and production decisions varies according to geographical location, culture and religion. Despite the important role women play in farm and household production, they have not been given due recognitions. Though women are playing very important roles within and outside the home, disparities still exists between men and women in education, health, employment, income opportunities, and control over assets, personal security and participation in the political process and in the agricultural sector. In most farming systems females participate in all phases of agricultural production, although their role including decision-making and control over resources and incomes

varies greatly from place to place. Women and girls are an important source of labour in cash crop production (Women in agriculture, 2008).

Access and control of resource and benefit :

Despite women's critical role in agriculture (globally they are responsible for at least 50 % of food produced) women generally lack access to effective technologies and resources such as credit, extension, seed supply and labour saving devices. It is difficult for women to secure land and other forms of collateral to be able to access credit and increase their productive capacity. Subsistence crop production, in which women are usually involved, still ends to receive less institutional support than cash crop production. The number of female extension officers can be limited, and as a result women may be less likely to receive agricultural extension services. The introduction of cash cropping a present problem for women's agricultural tasks. It may result in competition for labour and land that would otherwise be devoted to producing food (Malhotra, 2004).

Women in many parts of the world continue to face discrimination in access to land, housing, property and other productive resources and have limited access to technologies and services that could alleviate their work burdens. Unequal access to resources limits women's capacity to ensure agricultural productivity, security life hoods and food security and is increasingly linked to poverty, migration, urbanization and increased risk of violence (World survey on role of women in development, 2009). Population growths, climate change, the spread of markets and urbanization have creaked new opportunities and new challenges in women's access to land, housing and other productive resources. Women's access to all financial services, including savings, insurance, and remittance transfers and credit, is essential to allow them to benefit fully from economic opportunities. Legal, institutional and socio cultural barriers often, however, limit women's access to these services.

Solution towards gender equity :

Gender inequality is an obstruction to the growth of the country and is a problem that has a solution. Two decades of innovation, experiences, and activism have shown that achieving the goal of greater gender equality and women's empowerment is possible. There are many practical steps that can reduce inequalities based on

gender-inequalities that restrict the potential to reduce poverty and achieve high levels of well-being in societies around the world. There are also many positive actions that can empower women. Without leadership and political will, however, the world will fall short of taking these practical steps-meeting the goal. Because gender inequalities deeply rooted in entrenched attitudes, societal institutions, and market forces, political commitment at the highest international and national level is essential to institute the policies that can trigger social change and to allocate the resources necessary for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Ensuring women's economic empowerment and access to and control over resources requires an integrated approach to growth and development, focused on gender-responsive employment promotion and informed by the interdependency between economic and social development (UN report, 2009). Social objectives need to be incorporated into economic policies. Economic growth strategies should give attention to the real economy and focus on creating a gender sensitive macroeconomic environment, full employment and decent work, access to land, property and other productive resources as well as financial services and full coverage of social protection measures.

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