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## Women Empowerment: A Key To Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** *The present research paper explores the importance of Women Empowerment as one of the key factors in Sustainable Development. Empowering women is one of the important goals in achieving sustainable development throughout the world. It has been found that men have greater access to resources and opportunities as compared to women. Such kind of gender inequality can be found in other aspects of life as well, such as – access to education, finances, jobs, etc. The UN Women (2011) has made Gender Equality to be the goal which should be achieved. The present paper shall try to explain the concept of Women empowerment and how empowering women can lead to sustainable development. In addition, the paper shall also try to present the prevailing status of Women Empowerment in India.*

### Introduction

The term ‘Women empowerment’ refers to the process through which tools, resources, and prospects are made available to women, thus, enabling them to attain equality in all spheres of life viz. social, economic and political aspects. One of the main objectives of women empowerment is to form an inclusive and unbiased society where all women can enjoy the freedom to participate and thrive.

Various researchers have defined Women empowerment in numerous ways. Following is some of the definitions which throw light on the meaning of the concept of “Women Empowerment”:

- Chen and Tanaka (2014) have envisioned “women’s empowerment” as a process of increasing women’s access to control over the strategic life choices that affect them and access to the opportunities that allow them fully to realize their capacities.
- Huis et. al. (2017), have defined empowerment as a process through which a person transitions from being unpowered to the one who is empowered.

Women Empowerment can also be defined based on following aspects:

1. **On the basis of Society**, women empowerment can be defined as a process through which women can be enabled, so that, they can exercise control on their lives, their rights, and participate dynamically in the various decision-making processes of the society.
2. **On the basis of Economy**, women empowerment can be defined as a process through which the economic proficiencies of women can be enhanced by enabling them to make use of various resources, education, opportunities for employment, skills, etc. This way, they can have financial independence and can fully contribute to the economy of the country.
3. **On the basis of Political aspect**, women empowerment encompasses an increase in the participation and representation of women in political organizations and leadership roles, thus, ensuring that their opinions are perceived and addressed in authority and policymaking.

The above stated definitions of Women Empowerment highlight its multidimensional nature, which clearly reflects the social, economic, and political aspects to accomplish gender equality and equal opportunities.

### **Impact of Women Empowerment on Sustainable Development**

Women empowerment has been found to have a substantial influence upon sustainable development across many spheres:

1. **Growth in Economic Sphere**: When women participate in the world of work, become entrepreneurs and invest in their

communities, they are contributing equally in the economic growth of the nation. Hence, increasing women empowerment results in higher output and creativity.

2. **Reduction in Poverty**: When women are empowered, they are enabled to bring themselves and their families out of poverty. In the present times, it has been found that women contribute a significant amount of their earnings to manage their household expenses, children's education, medical expenses, etc., thus contributing significantly in bringing improvement in the well-being of the citizens as well as the nation.
3. **Healthcare**: When women are empowered, they are more aware of the healthcare services and thus, can have better access to it, thus, resulting in an improved well-being and health of the family. Empowered women are more likely to seek gynaecological services, prenatal care and family planning services, thereby, making a worthwhile contribution to communities which are healthier.
4. **Education**: Women empowerment promotes gender equality in education, ensuring equal access to education for girls and boys. Educated women are more likely to make informed decisions about their lives, participate in the workforce, and contribute to the development of their communities.
5. **Environmental Sustainability**: Women play an important role in sustainably managing resources and conserving environment. As women play a major in doing household chores, they can ensure the sustainable use of the environmental resources. When women are empowered, they can motivate others to make the best use of environmental resources and themselves serve as role models for others by sustainably using things.
6. **Peace and Security**: Empowered women always contribute in enhancing peace and puts all their efforts in resolving conflicts. It has been often found that when women hold designations and participate in important decision-making, they often prioritize peace, settlement, and collective bond, resulting in societies which have more stability and are resilient.

### Importance Of Psychological Empowerment

Women empowerment has been considered as one of the important modalities of giving fair and just treatment to women (Mahajan, 2022). Here, importance should also be given to psychologically empowering women as well. Psychological empowerment can be defined as a subjective and cognitive process which makes people feel effective, capable and responsible for performing their tasks (Llorento-Alonso, Garcia-Ael & Topa, 2024). A woman who is psychologically distressed would never have the ability to endure the numerous difficulties faced at home or at workplace because such women are over-stressed and have low self-esteem. It has been found that due to low psychological empowerment among women, their decision-making ability and resilience in stressful situations gets adversely affected. Therefore, it becomes highly important to psychologically empower women, so that their quality of life can be improved.

According to Padmajai (2023), women who are psychologically empowered exhibit high levels of self-esteem, competence and self-confidence. Such women have the capability to engage themselves in significant decision-making processes and challenge orthodox gender roles.

The following are the Seven Women Empowerment Principles which provide a framework to workplaces, so that, women can progress and be empowered (UN Women and the UN Global Compact Office, 2020):

1. High-Level Corporate Leadership
2. Treating all women and men without discrimination
3. Employee's health and well-being
4. Providing education and training for advancement in career
5. Enterprise and supply-chain development
6. Community initiatives
7. Measurement and reporting

In every workplace, let it be a company, organization or business set up, it must be ensured that these principles are adhered to, so that, gender equality be maintained and sustainable growth be promoted.

### Status Of Women Empowerment In India

The status of women's empowerment in India is intricate and multifaceted, influenced by an amalgamation of cultural, community, economic, and political factors. Although substantial development has been made in certain areas, there are still some challenges and disparities faced. The following is a discussion of some of these challenges:

1. **Legal and Policy Framework:** India has a robust legal and policy framework aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, including laws addressing issues such as dowry, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. However, implementation and enforcement of these laws remain uneven, and gaps persist in access to justice for women, particularly marginalized and rural communities.
2. **Education:** Many improvements have been made in India to improve the access to education for girls. Various initiative, namely Right to Education Act have been made, so that, the enrolment and retaining of girls in schools can be maximized. However, there are still certain challenges which are being faced, especially, in rural areas where girls are not able to get education.
3. **Economic Empowerment:** In the present times, the participation of Women in the workforce has increased significantly, where women are doing jobs in various sectors such as education, healthcare, banking, etc. Nevertheless, there are various barriers faced by women in the workplace, such as gender wage gaps, work-related discrimination, restricted access to recognition and land ownership, and lower opportunities for seeking promotions.
4. **Healthcare:** Much progress over the years has been made in India to improve the maternal and child healthcare services. Various initiatives, such as – National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan and LaQshya have been made which have brought significant improvement in providing access to maternal and newborn healthcare services. There are still challenges which are faced in providing high quality healthcare services to women dwelling in rural areas.

5. **Political Participation:** Over the years, the representation of women in political institutions has improved, but still their representation is disproportionately low as compared to men. Various initiatives have been taken to enhance the participation of women in politics but due to certain socio-cultural barriers and patriarchal norms, their progress remains hindered.

India has made an overall progress in improving the empowerment and rights of women, but still, a lot has to be done, in order to address tenacious gender inequalities and guarantee equivalent prospects and rights for women across all the spheres of society. Constant efforts by government, non-government organizations, etc. are vital to achieve gender equality and enhance women's empowerment in our nation, India.

### Conclusion

Women empowerment should not just be considered to be a goal, instead, it must be regarded as an ongoing and continuous movement, a vivacious process forming a world where liberty, equality, and opportunities are accessible to all, irrespective of their gender, age, colour and creed. We must ensure that the efforts we make today to empower women must lay a strong foundation to an empowered tomorrow.

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