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Education and Women Empowerment in Rural Areas

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ABSTRACT: Education is the key factor in the development of the country and the people living over there. Women empowerment refers to the ability for women to enjoy their right to freedom and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well being. It results in building the personality of an individual. In other words, the pathway to human-development goes through the lanes of education. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. The education of women and girls has a tremendous impact not only on their own development but also on their families and communities.

There is no denying of the fact that women in India have made a noteworthy progress since Independence. However, even today, they still have to fight back against many evil acts in the male-dominated society. Women in the rural areas are not allowed to have education as they are meant to do household chores, which will help them after marriage.

It is rightly said that Educate women in the family and whole family will be educated. In consideration of this, rural areas where the literacy rate is minimal among women are actively targeted to improve the situation of women through education. Many parents to date are of the view, that educating son is an investment because they still think that sons will take care of them when they will be old. So, if a rural family has to choose between educating a son or a daughter, typically the son will be chosen. Negative parental attitudes towards educating daughters can also be a barrier to a girl's education.

KEYWORDS: women, empowerment, rural, education, right, economic, knowledge

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Constitution provides for the principle of gender equality in its preamble, and women's equality is provided as a fundamental right. The constitution places obligations on the state to foster the same as part of its fundamental duty and to provide a definitive direction through well-thought-out policies and directions. However, there is still a long way to go even after more than seventy years of independence. Each day, the media is full of stories of atrocities against women. These issues are concentrated more in areas and communities that still accept the age-old concept of male superiority. The social and economic structure in rural India has not changed much over the years. Underemployment, casteism, and lack of education have a major role to play in the marginalization of women, particularly in rural areas.[1]



The gender disparity, especially in rural India, is a glaring and grim reminder to the still rampant problem of gender discrimination. Women still have issues concerning financial exclusion and the lack of education opportunities, medical care, sanitation facilities, and more. To address the issue of women's equality and uplift their social status, the Government of India has made a concerted effort by way of laws, plans, and programs in various spheres, with the realization that the way forward is to shift the focus from welfare to development. Thus women's empowerment has gained recognition as the core issue in uplifting the status of women.[2]

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in 2001 laid out goals and guiding principles for the empowerment of women:

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural, and civil;



- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision-making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- (iv) Equal access of women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process;
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.[3]

II. DISCUSSION



To train women representatives in the villages of India undertook training exercises for more than 400 elected representatives from twenty villages of different village-level institutions including the gram panchayat, school management committee (SMC), village health and sanitation committee (VHSNC), and anganwadi workers. The representatives were trained about the functions of these institutions with a structured curriculum. The program encouraged these women representatives to take up leadership roles through collective action for the overall development of villages. The results have contributed significantly to tackling local issues at the village level. In addition, a feeling of inclusion and self-esteem was inculcated—the first step in breaking the patriarchal divide.[4]

These women are now aware of schemes such as pensions (old-age, widow, handicapped, and deserted women), the public distribution system, Ayushman Bharat Yojana, labor card registration, Aapki Beti Hamari Beti, and many others. They are also informed about the work of the village-level institutions like VHSNC, SMC, and PRI, and their role as members. Armed with this knowledge, women are taking more actions at the village level. Often in a group, they go to different offices and meet officials and address the problems of the village.[5]

III. IMPLICATIONS

Lack of wastewater disposal facilities was a common problem in the villages. Dirty water was flowing onto the roads, due to inadequate wastewater disposal facilities, making the roads filthy. Women elected representatives (WERs) took the initiative to create wastewater disposal facilities.



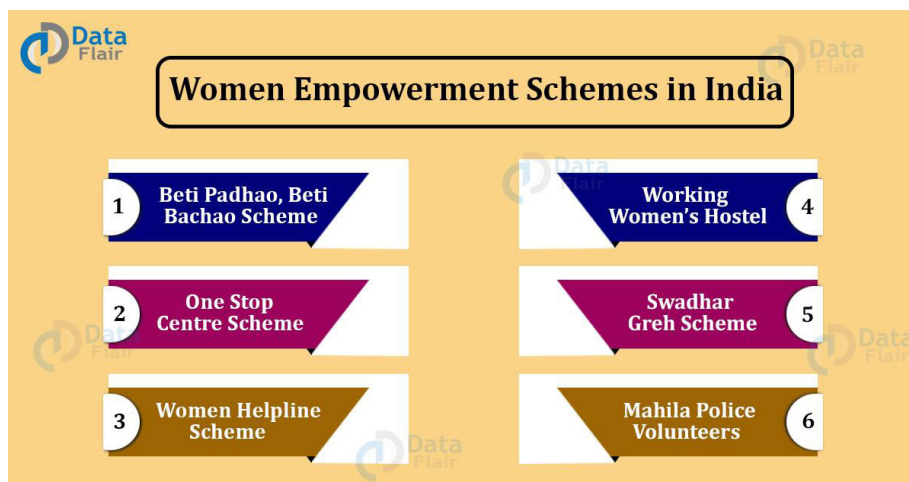
They approached the sarpanch of the villages, and explained the problem villagers were facing on a regular basis due to the unclean surroundings. The sarpanch was cooperative, met the secretary, and heard the women. Funds for the construction of nine soak pits were sanctioned within just a month. Right after the sanctioning of funds, a meeting was held to identify the areas to construct soak pits in the villages. Pregnant women and children had faced difficulties accessing the anganwadi center as the roads were full of filthy water. However, since the construction of a soak pit in close proximity, accessibility has been smooth.[6]

According to the villagers, the construction of soak pits helped in the reduction of filth over the roads. Although there was a soak well in the school for wastewater disposal, it was not enough for the schools and was perpetually overflowing dirty water over the entire school campus. The teacher said that five soak pits constructed in the primary and middle schools have solved the disposal problem and also controlled mosquito breeding to a great extent, and the area now seems neat and clean.



Water is a necessity for life. Primary schools in villages didn't even have the basic amenities. A bore well in one of the schools had been dysfunctional for the past four years. Children carried water bottles from home. The cook at school found it difficult to fetch water for cooking and cleaning the utensils. Hence, the water to cook the mid-day meals was arranged by the families living close to the schools.[7]

This challenges with the school teachers, where they learned that the school had no funds to install a hand pump. In the next few days, there were meetings and discussions between all women members, the sarpanch, and the school authorities regarding the issues faced by the students due to the unavailability of drinking water at the schools.



The sarpanch assured that the schools would be provided with adequate funds for the construction of a hand pump. A hand pump was installed each school, with the assistance of the school teachers. Now the teachers and students are content due to the free access to clean drinking water from the hand pump. The parents of the students also realized that it was primarily due to the initiative of women's groups in the villages that the water problem in the school was solved.[8]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Rural development NGOs are working to improve the lives of rural communities in India for more than twenty years.



Led by a vision that every person deserves to lead a more secure, prosperous, and dignified life, it has embarked on a mission to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India.[9]

Many Indian Foundations have created an ecosystem of programs to address rural India's most pressing needs of water management, agriculture development, local participation and sustainability, school transformation and outreach for development. Thus, the works with local communities across rural India to understand and alleviate their problems. Inclusion and gender participation across entire community is of paramount importance in every effort. To achieve all-around development for marginalized communities, the government supports gender parity by ensuring inclusivity in all its programs.[10,11]



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