



Women Empowerment Indicators: A Study of Gadarpur Block of Udham Singh Nagar District

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Abstract

Empowerment in the context of women's development is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in a woman's life through which she increases her ability to shape her life and environment. It is an active, multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Women constitute almost half of the total population in the world and out of which two third of world's adult illiterates are women. According to FAO, the most disadvantaged section of society is the women; they are the 'silent majority' of the world's poor. Seventy per cent of the world's poor are women. This study was conducted in one of the development blocks of Udham Singh Nagar district i.e. Gadarpur block on 100 women respondents (the wives of household heads) selected from four villages of Gadarpur block. The result indicated that the maximum percentages of the women respondents were found to be having medium level of empowerment. It means the women have less involvement in decision making right on family affairs, agricultural matters, occupational matters and the women have little bit freedom of free avenues of expression.

Key words: Women empowerment, Women empowerment indicators, challenging and overcoming barriers

I. Introduction

Significant development in recent years has been the mushrooming of community-based organizations and initiatives at the local level for women. Women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment; economic, educational, social and political would hasten the pace of social development. Investing in women's "capabilities" and empowering them to achieve their "choices" and "opportunities" is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development. (Patttnaik, 2000) Empowerment goes beyond socio-economic or political attributes and essentially refers to a process of becoming psychologically empowered. Poverty inflicts deep-rooted wounds on the psyche of individuals. This paper addresses the women empowerment indicators as tools for empowering poor women.

What is empowerment?

The concept of empowerment has been the subject of much intellectual discourse and analysis. For the purposes of this discussion, the conceptual framework expounded by United Nations is a useful starting point (United Nations 2001). The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer 2001). Two vital processes have been identified as important for empowerment. The first is social mobilization and collective agency, as poor women often lack the basic capabilities and self-confidence to counter and challenge existing disparities and barriers against them. (UNDP 2001).

Empowering aspects of self-help micro credit schemes:

Several recent assessment studies have also generally reported positive impacts (Simanowitz and Walker 2002). Impact assessment studies point to asset creation as one of the main indicators, measurable by empirical data. From field visits done by the author, and from various documented sources, it would appear that financial services, especially micro credit, provided to self-help groups have brought about an increase in household income. Empowerment is considered as the phenomenon of nineties and is defined as 'giving power to', 'creating power within' and 'enabling'. Therefore, empowerment involves negotiation of the balance of power between more and less powerful through reformist or revolutionary mean. Keeping in view the above facts, the present study was conducted with following objectives:

1. To study the socio-personal characteristics of rural women.
2. To find out the empowerment extent of rural women with the help of different empowerment indicators.

II. Methodology

The present study was conducted in two randomly selected village; viz; kalinagar and motipur in gadarpur block in U.S Nagar dicticts which lies in the tarai region of undertaken. A list of women was prepared for each selected village. A total of 100 women respondents were selected from the list through proportionate random sampling technique. To measure the empowerment extent of rural women, the semi-structured schedule was developed including different indicators.

(A.) Brief socio- economic profile of women in rural area :

Maximum numbers of women respondents (70%) were found in the age group of 38-57 years belonging to backward caste (62%). Joint families (70%) were observed maximum and agriculture was observed as main occupation (79%). Mixed type of houses were 60 per cent and 65 per cent women respondents earned an annual income of up to Rupees 20,000/-. The maximum percentages of the women respondents (77%) were observed to have agricultural experience of medium category (11 to 39 years). *Gram pradhan* (0.85) and cooperative society (0.73) were the formal sources of information whereas, family members (6.93) and neighbors (7.74) were the informal sources and in case of mass media, radio (6.95) and television (0.52) were the main sources of information.

(B.) Empowerment Extent of women in rural area:

The empowerment extent of rural women was judged with the help of different empowerment indicators like education, decision making right, free avenues of expression, employment opportunities and self-employment.

Education:

It refers to the level of formal education obtained by the respondents. Thus, the respondents were grouped in several literacy categories viz., illiterate and literate. It reveals that the literacy percentage of the respondents was 34% and 66% respondents were found illiterate. The literacy among scheduled caste women is lower than that of men in rural areas (Trivedi, 1977). In spite of the necessity of education, it is not a sufficient condition for raising the status of women.

Decision making right:

Decision making is a mental process of selecting the best one to find out the best alternatives and decision making right is defined as the participation or involvement of rural women on various matters like family affairs, agricultural matters and occupational matters. 48 per cent of the respondents were found to be having medium level of decision making right on family affairs followed by low (26%) and high (26%) respectively. It is often seen in tribal society that women play a crucial role in decision making process about household economy like role of agricultural produces, livestock and major forest produce. They go along with their husbands to weekly markets for sale or purchase of products or other commodities. On migration of wage labour, about 30 per cent women accompany their husbands (Singh, 1998).

Employment opportunities:

Employment is working for others (individual or organization) under limited remuneration keeping aside own wish and liking. It was measured on the basis of freedom to the women in family for seeking employment opportunities. 25% and 10% women respondents were such who had low and high levels of employment opportunities respectively.

III. Conclusion

Women have benefited more as workers than as a community. Women as individuals have gained because of their ability to earn independently, made possible due to the paid employment opportunity and monetized earnings have increased consumption choices and reduced economic dependence. This has helped women in registering their tangible contribution to the household's income. The overall effects of these have translated into an increased say for women in household affairs. More facilities should be provided by the state government for development of women so that the women can bear the risk if any and the execution of different innovative programmes is necessary for empowering women by government and non-government organizations. Thus, provision should be made for providing equal status to women in society who are equal partners in development.

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