



**THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AREAS
TOWARDS SOCIO- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

After a careful observation and examination of the way rural women are treated and forced to behave, this article has been presented may be to challenge the world to treat women differently, the rural women to step up the fight for their rights and the national governments to design more moderate policies that may see the rural women enjoy their living in rural settings.

Although, worldwide, a woman is the nucleus of the family, in rural areas women are not only used as donkeys to collect water, fire wood, fodder and serve food but are playing a significant role in preserving the culture, groom the children and shape their destiny. The opinion of Manibhai (2017) is that although women represent 51% of the total population, they contribute less than 15% to the development of our rural societies while men contribute only 85%. Unfortunately, in spite of their laudable and vulnerable roles, which could not be substituted by machines or men, women have been neglected since generations due to the persistent gender discrimination.

The purpose of this article is to examine the contribution of women empowerment in rural areas towards socio- economic development. This article has attempted to expose what many people in

the world have not realized as indeed suffering of the rural woman under the thinking that the unprogrammed roles she is subjected to are her unavoidable daily routine. While the rural women do 90% of the work in the home, the men are merely doing a 10% that constitutes meeting friends for gossiping and taking alcohol. Contrary to the men, for the rural women, the day starts as early as 4.00am in the morning with the responsibilities of preparing breakfast for the husband and the children, fetching firewood and cooking food. She takes care of the children and members of the family, their health, orientation and education and attends to various income generating activities. She manages all the household matters, looks after the family assets and livestock, handles the purchases and finances, works for almost 16 hours and is the last to sleep at night.

The readers of this article should not remain the same. This article should drive the world into doing something to rescue the rural women to enjoy their human rights as women and mothers in true independent countries. The writers are just tickling the readers and others to rest themselves into the support for the women and to appreciate the goodness hidden in the women and design ways of living with that goodness and enjoy it peacefully. The writers are also tickling the readers to convince the men to play their roles in child rearing, family financial generation and home responsibility sharing.

Key words: Women empowerment, Capacity, Poverty, Gender, Development

Introduction

Empowerment has different interpretations. The World Bank, defining its approach to empowerment for economic growth and poverty reduction, describes empowerment as "... the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (World Bank 2002, Narayan 2005).

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Most studies about women empowerment have majorly looked at sources to empower women, methods of empowerment and benefits from empowerment but mainly with urban women. So far no study or article has looked at empowering rural woman who constituted 80% of the women population in the world.



Women participation in almost all activities is undoubted, if empowered. History reveals that in Africa, there is a list of strong women empowered and who became the pillars in their states. Women had traditionally played critical roles in the African societies. Gender equality flourished in Africa where women occupied positions of responsibility. Among the many on record were: Queen Ann Nzinga of Angola, Makeda the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopia and Yaa A Santewa of the Ashanti Empire, There are also many other women that held very great responsibilities in our ancient civilizations, whose good deeds continue to influence us today (Blanchy Sophie (2010).

In most developing countries there is overwhelming evidence that women contribute to economic development in various ways and are the primary caregivers in households. This has redefined their roles and responsibilities in families and communities although balancing paid work and unpaid care responsibilities are still daunting tasks for most women in the world especially in underdeveloped countries. The roaming question is what difference this has made to the women! Studies on rural women empowerment reveal that social -economic women empowerment is the back-bone of our nations today, as women constitute 52% of our total

population. They can rightly be called the “**Change Agents**”. Hence, women ought to be socially empowered by eradication of evils and crimes of socio-economic origin.

In recent years significant steps have been made by governments and other organizations to promote women’s economic empowerment but the urban women have had to steal the show. The rural women today lack existence of women's organizations and other support systems that may be used in their empowerment. It is even common practice that there is lack of women-specific data and other relevant information that may be depended on to make developmental plans for them. According to the information by UN, (2005) the rural woman suffers also from things like feminist leadership; networkings; favorable media coverage and favorable policy, climate and political will to catalyze rural women empowerment. The rural woman who wakes up at 4.00am everyday to prepare for the husband and children to have a good breakfast has heavy work load each day that isolates her from all other fellow women. The rural woman once illiterate as the case is usually so in most developing countries will remain as she lacks opportunity in terms of time, money and even permission from the family members to study, (UN,2005). The unfriendly traditional views limit women’s participation in almost every family or village matters.

Economic empowerment involves improving the ability of women to access resources and employment, higher productivity and earnings, and increases in the income, assets, expenditure, and consumption of food and items they control. The legal and institutional barriers in the labor market and the way unpaid domestic work and care work are shared at the household and societal levels heavily influences this domain.

Political empowerment is about participation and decision making in formal institutions, including local country governments, interest groups, civil society and women’s ability to set and influence the political discourse. Social empowerment refers to women’s status in society, which depends on social norms, gender roles within the household and the community and social capital.

This article aims at tickling the reader to think in the direction of enabling the rural women to contribute towards participation in leadership, decision making and stepping up their family support but doing it freely and willingly.

Conceptual Analysis of the Existing Situation

There is consensus among the rural populations that "empowerment" has become one of the most widely used development terms. Women's groups, non-governmental development organizations, activists, politicians, governments and international agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals yet it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed. It is precisely because this word has now been one of the fashionable concepts to include in policies/programs/projects that there is a need to clarify and come up with tentative definitions. Furthermore, the particular implications of empowerment of women are an area that needs to be discussed.

The status of women in any society is an indicator of civilization (UN,2005). But, women in developing countries especially are not allowed to actively participate in the mainstream of development even though they represented a big proportion of the population and labour force. Participation provides an opportunity to make the women economically empowered and free. Today, rural women face mostly the cultural and societal barriers where women are not allowed to purchase or take any finance related responsibility in the family. Its common practice that many rural women depend on their husbands' income for whatever to do and cannot conduct any expenditure unless permitted by the husbands. Women are still facing challenges of participation in crucial decision-making processes on for example matters connected with land and sharing of domestic work with their husbands (UN (2009)). Not only do those challenges above limit women empowerment, but, there is also that one where the rural woman has no control over her reproductive functions and so can never decide on matters of family size and management (UN (2009)). The woman in rural areas according to most cultures especially in developing countries cannot decide where the income she has earned will be channeled to neither is she allowed to express pride and value in her work at home but has to attribute it to the husband who may not have contributed at all (UN (2009)). Although she may have the money to educate her children, she is culturally not allowed to take decisions about the education of her children, food management, her own mobility, decision regarding attending social and family gatherings and functions. The unfriendly traditional views limit women's participation in almost every family or village matters.

Future for the Rural Women

For the rural women to realize empowerment to them, a number of things should be done by their governments. The following have been suggested:

- Provision of education to all, indiscriminately;
- Carrying out awareness campaigns;
- Conducting regular trainings;
- Allowing the media to play its awareness roles;
- Conducting and making use of the research findings

The formal and non-formal education systems would need to be considered. In concrete terms, this would mean securing equal access for boys and girls in education; implementing special programs for women in the field of Adult Education; incorporating issues such as tradition, race, ethnicity, gender sensitization, urban and rural developmental contexts in the programs and politicizing women to show them how macro level mismanagement is responsible for their loss of empowerment.

Through networking, it would be possible to share experiences and learn from one another. In this manner, understanding and solidarity among women's organizations, development organizations (governmental/non- governmental) and multilateral agencies could be forged. This would therefore entail networking at the national, regional and international levels. Moreover, at the international level,. This can be through:

- Organizing at least one meeting a year on gender management;
- Bringing together donor agencies (governments and NGOs);
- Setting up a North-South dialogue and collaboration;
- Linking women's movements all over the world;
- Establishing alternative credit schemes that offer women access to funds.

If one is to have an effective society, it is good to undertake campaigning and lobbying activities that will put the issue of gender in the minds of the legislators, policy-makers and the larger public. This will therefore help the local society in pushing for a dialogue between stakeholders to raise gender issues within the national policy arena; lobbying for sex-equity and affirmative action; lobbying for "counter structural adjustment policies;" organizing pressure groups for demanding for women rehabilitation centers.

Considering the attitudinal barriers in traditional societies and the role which the media plays in reinforcing them, the following strategies may be used for media involvement:

- Organizing media campaigns to raise awareness;
- Creating a social climate friendly to women's issues;
- Improving on women participation in the kitchen.

It is also considered important to organize workshops to train rural women to conduct participatory research where they can develop skills to critically analyze their existing conditions. This will facilitate them organizing for collective action.

It is important that women have access to the different training opportunities previously denied to them. This therefore means:

- Preparing for jobs that are usually not open to them;
- Providing income-generating projects
- Training capable female leaders at all levels.

Expected Outcomes

Women empowerment is not so difficult to achieve if the will of everyone is available. Rural women will be liberated and instead of being a bother they will become useful society members. There will be allocation of funds to women and women's projects taking place and usability will not be questioned as they will be in position to use such funds profitably instead of giving it to their husbands for taking alcohol and remarrying.

- There will be increased number of women leaders at village, district, provincial and national levels;
- There will be increased women participation in technology
- Participation in community programs, productive enterprises, politics and arts;
- Involvement of women in non-traditional tasks;
- Increased training programs for women

- Awareness of her social and political rights;
- Integration of women in the general development plan;
- Existence of women's networks and publications;
- Increased media participation in women developmental programmes.

CONCLUSION

For a long time the urban women have stolen the show from the rural women. The campaign now is focused on the rural women. This is because rural women empowerment can increase team support to the family members in for example getting health insurance, food stuffs, attending in school classes and accessing community resources.

The rural women today lack existence of women's organizations and other support systems that may be used to empower them. It is even common practice that there is lack of women-specific data and other relevant information that may be depended on to make developmental plans for them. The rural woman suffers also from things like feminist leadership; networking; favorable media coverage and favorable policy, climate and political will to catalyze rural women empowerment. The unfriendly traditional views limit women's participation in almost every family or village matters. If women do not take enough care they may be subjected to internal marriage/ family wars and other forms of injustice. It is at this juncture that despite all past reverences advocating for women emancipation, all the benefits have gone to the urban woman. It is the turn for the rural woman.

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