

# A Study on Women Empowerment and Human Development Index

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## **Abstract**

Women's empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. Empowering women is one of the most crucial concerns of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. The key objective of this research article is to measure women's empowerment in India by identifying the household decision-making ability of women, assessing the economic decision-making capability of women and evaluating the freedom of mobility of women for giving recommendations and suggestions to boost women's empowerment in India. Here we are constructing the Index of Women Empowerment (IWE) has been constructed where indicators like women's political participation, work participation rate, literacy and average daily earning have been used to assess the extent of women empowerment and the ranking of the states has been done on the basis of this index. Statistical package for social science (SPSS) is the main tool for data analysis and we have used a regression model and frequency tables. For quantitative analysis, we have selected four main variables as independent variables and the index of women empowerment as the dependent variable. We have done hypothesis testing by taking four hypotheses out of that two have been accepted and two rejected.

**Keywords:** Women, Empowerment, Human, Development

## **Introduction**

Women play a pivotal role in the overall progress of a country as they constitute half the human resources of a nation. The economic wealth of a country is seriously depleted if about half of the nation's human resource is neglected. Recognizing the need for involving women in various development activities, the Government of India has initiated several affirmative measures by way of programmes and schemes to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative actions have brought about perceptible changes in the socio-

economic conditions of women. The literacy rate of females, which was 8.86 per cent in 1951 rose to 54.16 per cent in 2001. Women's work participation rate, which was 19.7 per cent in 1981, rose to 25.7 per cent in 2001. The database also brings out the areas where the progress has been slow if not retrograde. The sex ratio in the 0-6 years age group dropped from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, which indicates that society still does not welcome a girl child and the preference rests with sons. Nearly 50 per cent of women get married before they attain 18 years of age, 57.9 per cent of pregnant women and 56.2 per cent of married women suffer from anaemia. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) is still quite high, at 254 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (in 2006). Thus, there is room for much more to be done to ameliorate the plight of women at the grass-root level.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to human development. Since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, considerable progress has been made, yet in the meanwhile along with existing shortfalls, new and extensive challenges have emerged, pertaining both to women's status and the full realization of their human rights. To take account of expanded research and knowledge on what affect these issues, and more and better data available, it is timely to review how achievement of the equality and empowerment of women may better be measured in an international context.

With new sources and more data disaggregated by gender being collected and compiled, dimensions of deprivation that were previously difficult to measure may become accessible. At the same time, advances in conceptual, empirical and methodological knowledge could help design new approaches to quantified measurements of gender equality and women's empowerment. The goals, targets and indicators for the post-2015 agenda are likely to give rise to expanded sets of national indicators; regular review of progress could strengthen monitoring and sustain momentum.

The Expert Group Meeting on gender equality and its measurement is intended as an occasion to revisit the various approaches to this issue through open dialogues that will take stock of several of the most prominent measures currently in use, explore areas that need greater attention, examine methodological underpinnings, and assess the potential of emerging data to fill gaps.

These discussions are especially timely given the additional emphasis given to the eradication of gender-based inequalities in the post-2015 development agenda, as manifested in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets and indicators.

## **Gender Equality and Human Development**

The fundamental principle of human development is for people to enlarge their choices, to realize their potential, and to enjoy the freedom to lead lives they value or have reason to value. Equal opportunities in all spheres, for all people, women and men alike, are at the heart of the human development. However, those options remain unequally distributed within and across societies and unfortunately many are still largely unavailable to women. Disadvantage and discrimination, lack of insights into what particularly affects women's lives, including health (physical and emotional), reinforced by social norms and values, institutions, and public policies, exist in every sphere of women's lives, manifested differently in different country settings. They limit women's capabilities, opportunities, and choices, resulting in less progress than men in terms of health, education, the standard of living, empowerment, personal security and other critical dimensions of human development. Thus, the full potential of many women's lives cannot reach the optimal level and humanity as a whole does not reap its potential. Since its inception in 1990, the Human Development Report (HDR) has presented many aspects of these disparities – such as those in education, work, health, political participation and often underlying issues related to data and measurement. The 1995 HDR was one of the first global development publications to bring these ideas to the fore in an integrated manner, including a presentation of the historical and political movement for gender equality within the human development paradigm.

Much progress has been made over the past 20 years in reducing these disparities; however, the unfinished tasks are still pronounced and new challenges continue to emerge, and new insight is generated through 2 more extensive research and attention to disaggregated and relevant data collection that also begs new measurements of progress for women. And although some convergence has occurred in 'capabilities' between men and women as measured by the traditional HDI indicators it appears not adequate for women's functioning's and ability to exercise the same choices and realise their potential. These differences generate unequal achievements. As a result, the full potential of many women's lives cannot be realised.

## **Index of Women Empowerment (IWE)**

Women's empowerment is multidimensional and it is very difficult to measure. It comprises the entire complexities of interactions, roles, rights and status that surround being male versus being female in a given society or culture (Mason, 1997). However, in our study, we have

tried to measure women's empowerment in the domestic sphere by making a women empowerment index. Here we construct the index of women empowerment (IWE) where several indicators have been used to assess the extent of women empowerment. The most commonly used indicators are women's political participation, work participation rate, literacy and average daily earnings. A comprehensive measure of women's empowerment should be able to incorporate information on several aspects (dimensions) of women's empowerment, preferably in one single number. Such a measure can be used to compare the levels of women empowerment across economies and across states/provinces within countries at a particular time point. It can be used to monitor the progress of women's empowerment in a country over a period of time. The various dimensions of IWE are as follows.

Political Empowerment (Dimension1): It refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. It measures the dimension of political empowerment by using data on the number of female ministers, seats in parliament held by women, women holding senior, legislative and managerial positions and the number of years a female has been head of state (president or prime minister) in each of the 34 states. The present study concentrates on the percentage of women in political participation across the states. Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. ii. Educational Attainment (Dimension 2): It is, without doubt, the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence. Moreover, the risk increases for society as a whole that the next generation of children will be similarly ill-prepared. If, as a broad body of empirical work has shown, education and literacy reduce mortality rates of children— including the bias toward female child mortality—and help reduce fertility rates, the importance of literacy for women is all the greater, considering that women still constitute two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. In the present study, educational attainment is captured using data on female literacy rates across the population. In this way, we are able to illustrate not only the current levels of women's empowerment through education, but also the potential of future generations of women in a particular nation. iii. Economic Participation (Dimension 3): The

economic participation of women—their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms—is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole. Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development. Economic participation concerns not only the actual numbers of women participating in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. The present study attempts to capture the empowerment of women in terms of economic participation by comparing work participation rate across the states. iv. Economic opportunity (Dimension4): It concerns the quality of women’s economic involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers. This is a particularly serious problem in developing countries, where women may gain employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either concentrated in poorly paid or unskilled job “ghettos,” characterized by the absence of upward mobility and opportunity. This is most commonly the result of negative or obstructive attitudes, and of legal and social systems which use maternity laws and benefits to penalize women economically for childbirth and child care responsibilities, and discourage—or actively prevent—men from sharing family responsibilities. In this study, we use data on the duration of maternity leave, the percentage of wages paid during the covered period and the number of women in managerial positions to capture the variation between the economic opportunities available to women in different countries.

### **Female Literacy**

Literacy is the first step towards formal education. It refers to the ability to read and write. Female literacy has been improving over the years. The proportion of women who are literate has increased by 15 per cent over the last decade from 39 per cent in 1991 to 54 per cent in 2001. This is a remarkable improvement that reflects the concerted efforts of the state along with the assistance of non-governmental organisations and other concerned groups. Yet, even today 193 million women lack the basic capability to read and write. The emphasis laid on education, especially for women, is visible in the policy documents of the government such as the various Five-Year Plans (since the Sixth Plan, 1980.85, in particular), the National Policy on Education (NPE) and so on (see Gopalan 2002; Government of India 1974;

Mazumdar et al. 2001, for a detailed exposition of the evolution and planning of women's education). Many programmes targeting different segments of the population have been instituted to promote literacy among women, young and old. These efforts have been only partially successful on account of the lower value ascribed to women's education in our society. All Indian states have registered improvements in female literacy rates (Table 1). Rajasthan, with the worst literacy levels among women in 1991 (as low as 20 per cent), has doubled its proportion of literate women in a decade to 44 per cent in 2001. Chattisgarh, the newly-formed state, and Madhya Pradesh are the other states with similar levels of improvement in women's literacy. This is an outcome of various educational programmes such as Mahila Samakhya, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Adult Literacy Mission and Non-Formal Education ventures (Karlekar 2000; Rampal 1996). The states with high women's literacy levels are Kerala, Mizoram and Goa. These are also the states where the gap in literacy rates between men and women is low. Bihar, U.P. and Jharkhand remain the worst states in terms of women's literacy, despite some improvements over the decade. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh exhibit literacy levels that are below the all- India average.

### **Female Daily Earnings**

There is enough evidence that women are paid less than men for the same work. Coupled with gender discrimination in wage differentials is inequality in access to superior positions and promotions. Women are often seen in the lower categories of the job hierarchy. Discrimination exists not only in terms of wages but also in terms of access to employment. Often women are found concentrated in occupations where the wage rates, as well as working conditions are poor and substandard. Low levels of skill on entry, lack of access to on the job training, employment histories punctuated by time spent bearing and raising children, time off to care for family members and the assumption that men are the primary earners all contribute to the implicit assumption that women should be paid less than men. However the average daily earnings of women crafts workers are low, nearly half of that paid to male workers. In 2004-05, average casual wage for males and females was just Rs. 55 and Rs. 35 respectively in rural areas and Rs. 75 and Rs. 44 respectively in urban areas. Among the states, Mizoram (114.50) is the highest average daily female earnings in India, followed by Punjab (73.98), and Kerala (62.22) with lowest female daily earnings of Orissa (22.32), Madhya Pradesh (25.44) and Andhra Pradesh (26.49).

## Conclusion

Based on research findings we have certain recommendations for the agencies working for women empowerment. Economic self-sufficiency is necessary, though it is not a sufficient condition for the empowerment of women. One of the limitations of this index is that it didn't include the social factor, although it contributes more to women's empowerment. Public policies are extremely important to strengthen the legal institutions that guarantee equal rights and opportunities to women. The recent policy framework of international agencies such as the World Bank that emphasize institutional reforms along with human development is a positive step in this direction. Although some variables have no significant relationship, it is advised that future research on women's empowerment in India can concentrate more on variables that have a positive impact on women's empowerment. The government and non-government agencies can work on enhancing women's traits and capabilities. Participation in seminars and lectures and encouragement for taking waged employment would help or strengthen the role of women in decision making.

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