

Gender equality and women empowerment

Dutta Anwesh^{1*}, Sahoo Truptirekha², Mohapatra Barnali³

¹Berhampur University

²Berhampur University

³Berhampur University

* E-mail: anwesa.dutta2015@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender equality and women's empowerment are two sides of the same coin. Both have multiple dimensions that together yield a wide variety of indicators. The report provides information on progress in India toward the twin goals of gender equality and women's empowerment; determinants of selected indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment; and, associations of women's empowerment with selected health and nutritional outcomes. Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of the society including economic participation and decision making and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored. The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. This paper deals with importance of gender equality towards achieving the goal of women empowerment. It outlines the gender inequality scenario in India and types of inequalities between men and women. This paper sheds light on importance of gender equality and role of gender equality in women empowerment, gender concern in development and gender mainstreaming in development. This paper concludes with some interesting findings along with policy suggestions.

Keywords: Gender equality; Women's empowerment

1. Introduction

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that the decision making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favor, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partner in productive and reproductive life.

2. Literature Review

Even though an extensive literature tries and assesses the equity implications of gender inequality (e.g. the existence of unexplained inequality in wages¹, potential gender gaps in the intra-

household allocation of goods through demand analysis²) not much has been said about the efficiency costs of this inequality. It is sometimes said that discrimination hinders economic development, but how does this happen? Some studies explore the empirical relationship between different forms of gender inequality and growth. Most of them consist of cross-country analyses that measure gender inequality in terms of schooling, life expectancy³, or the gender wage gap, so that the usual problems arise (e.g. unobserved heterogeneity across countries). Therefore the use of panel data from Indian states constitutes an alternative empirical analysis that might manage to overcome these shortcomings—in fact, to our knowledge this is the first paper that quantifies the aggregate effects of gender discrimination that does not consist of a cross-country analysis. The type of discrimination used in this paper is related to the concept of discrimination on grounds of employers' tastes, which was first used by Becker (1971), and may be rational in the context of religious or traditional beliefs that may operate as

¹ Instances are Blau(1996), Blau and Kahn (1994, 1999), Horrace and Oaxaca (2001), and Tam (1996). For the case of India, see Madheswaran and Lakshmanasamy (1996), who also consider how much of the gender gap among female and male science graduates is due to occupational segregation, and Duraisamy and Duraisamy (1996, 1999a, 1999b).

² Deaton(1989, 1997), Burgess and Zhang (2001).

³ See Dollar and Gatti (1999), Klasen (1999), Esteve-Volart (2000), Knowles et al. (2002), Seguino (2000), or World Bank (2001a) for a survey. Tzannatos (1992) uses simulation and occupational data from a few Latin American countries to assess what would be the change in the gender composition of the labor force and in Output was there wage equality across genders.

social norms in many countries⁴. The concept of social norm that we use as to explain what we call total discrimination is related to the concept of social stigma in Goldin (1994). The idea that distortions in the allocation of talent across occupations or sectors have negative growth implications is not new (Murphy et al. (1991), Fershtman et al. (1996)), but to our knowledge this is the first study to use it in order to analyze the consequences of discrimination. Several studies report that in many countries it is more difficult for females to have access to human capital, land, and financial or other assets that allow them to be entrepreneurs (Blackden and Bhanu (1999), International Labour Organization (1995)). Even in the 30 most developed countries in the world, the average incidence of females among managers is less than 30 percent. For Africa and Asia (including Pacific countries), according to the International Labour Organization (1995), the rates are lower than 15 percent (data refer to 1985-95), while female labor activity rates figures for 1999 are as low as 9.3 percent for Oman, 10.8 percent for Iraq, 14.5 percent for Jordan, 23.1 percent for Egypt, and 29.4 percent for India (World Bank (2001b)). There also exists an extensive literature that investigates a reverse relationship, i.e. how gender inequality changes along the development process. Some studies find the linear negative relationship that would be predicted by the neoclassical model, a second array of papers seem to find the U-shaped relationship described by Boserup (1970), in the same way as Kuznets (1955) established for income inequality, while finally another set of papers finds either no robust relationship or mixed results⁵.

This paper can also be related to some studies that explore other types of discrimination or discriminating in a broad sense. Coate and Tennyson (1992) explore what happens when individuals belonging to a group that is discriminated against face higher interest rates in borrowing to enter self-employment. This statistical discrimination is not derived from credit market discrimination, but from labor market discrimination, which spills over to the credit market in the context of asymmetric information regarding borrowers.

2.1. Gender equity in India

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women, within the framework. Democratic polity, our laws, Development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres; From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards; there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality report mentions that in order to be empowered, women

⁴ Nirmala and Parthasarthy (1999) find that marginalisation of women workers in India has been more in low Growth states like Bihar and Orissa than in technology-intensive areas such as Punjab. According to the authors, Cultural factors, more than technology, lead to women's marginalisation in the Indian labor market.

⁵ See Forsythe et al. (2000) for a complete literature review and description of the different approaches.

should have equal capabilities, education and health status, equal access to resources and opportunities, for instance property rights, ownership of land and employment opportunities. The report lists strategic priorities and suggests practical measures for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and empowerment of women by 2015. The measures suggested in the report include: strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls; investing in improving infrastructure to reduce women's burdens; 'availability of loans and financial assistance for income generation; guaranteeing property and inheritance rights to women.

2.2. Gender inequality in agriculture

As per the report by Rao, E. Krishna (2006), over 50 per cent of Indian labor is employed in agriculture. A majority of rural men work as cultivators, while a majority of women work in livestock maintenance, egg and milk production. It could be noted that about 78 per cent of rural women are engaged in agriculture, compared to 63 per cent men. About 37 per cent of women are cultivators, but they are more active in the irrigation, weeding, winnowing, transplanting and harvesting stages of agriculture. About 70 per cent of farm work was performed by women in India in 2004. Women's labor participation rate is about 47 per cent in India's tea plantations, 46 per cent in cotton cultivation, 45 per cent growing oil seeds and 39 per cent in horticulture. There is wage inequality between men and women in India. The largest wage gap was in manual sloughing operations in 2009, where men were paid Rs. 103 per day, while women were paid Rs.55, a wage gap ratio of 1.87. For sowing the wage gap ratio reduced to 1.38 and for weeding 1.18. For other agriculture operations such as winnowing, threshing and transplanting, the men to female wage ratio varied from 1.16 to 1.28. For sweeping, the 2009 wages were statistically same for men and women in all states of India.

2.3. Occupational inequalities

Women are not allowed to have combat roles in the armed forces. According to a study carried out on this issue, a recommendation was made that female officers be excluded from induction in close combat arms, where chances of physical contact with the enemy are high. It is reported that a permanent commission could not be granted to female officers since they have neither been trained for command nor have they been given the responsibility so far. It shows persistence of disempowerment of women in holding certain occupations in India.

2.4. Property rights

Women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, but in practice, women are at a disadvantage. This is evidenced in the fact that 70 per cent of rural land is owned by men. Laws, such as the Married Women Property Rights Act of 1974 protect women, but few seek legal redress. Although the Hindu Succession Act of 2005 provides equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, the law is weakly enforced, especially in Northern India. The denial of property rights hinder the economic empowerment of women.

2.5. Education inequalities

India is on target to meet its Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education by 2015. UNICEF's measure of attendance rate and Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) captures the quality of education. Despite some gains, India needs to triple its rate of improvement to reach GEEI score of 95 per cent by 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals. In rural India girls continue to be less educated than the boys. It shows that denial of educational empowerment of girls in India.

2.6. Literacy

As per the report by Kalyani Menon-Sen, A. K. Shiva Kumar (2001), the female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. According to Census of India 2011, literacy rate of females is 65.46 per cent compared to a male which is 82.14 per cent. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. According to Kingdon, Geeta Gandhi (2007), the major factor behind the improved social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy. From 2006-2010, the percent of females who completed at least a secondary education was almost half that of men, 26.6 per cent compared to 50.4 per cent. In the current generation of youth, the gap seems to be closing at the primary level and increasing in the secondary level. In rural Punjab, the gaps between girls and boys in school enrolment increases dramatically with age as demonstrated in National Family Health Survey-3 where girls age 15-17 in Punjab are 10 per cent more likely than boys to drop out of school. Although this gap has been reduced significantly, problems still remain in the quality of education for girls where boys in the same family will be sent to higher quality private schools and girls sent to the government school in the village.

2.7. Reservations for female students

Under Non-Formal Education programmed, about 40 per cent of the centers in states and 10 percent of the centers in UTs are exclusively reserved for females. As of 2000, about 0.3 million NFE centers were catering to about 7.42 million children, out of which about 0.12 million were exclusively for girls. Certain state level engineering, medical and other colleges like in Orissa have reserved 30 per cent of their seats for females. The Prime Minister of India and the Planning Commission also vetoed a proposal to set up an Indian Institute of Technology exclusively for females. Although India had witnessed substantial improvements in female literacy and enrolment rate since the 1990s, the quality of education for female remains to be heavily compromised as the country continues to hold greater value for male than female. Even today the government of India is unable to implement the 33 per cent of reservation to women, indicating male dominance in India.

2.8. Health and survival inequalities

On health and survival measures, international standards consider the birth sex ratio implied sex-selective abortion, and gender inequality between women's and men's life expectancy and relative number of years that women live compared to men in good health by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors.

2.9. Gender-based violence

As per the report by Crime in India (2012), average annual crime rates per 100,000 women in India by its States and Union Territories. Crime rate in this map includes all Indian Penal Code crimes such as rape, sexual assault, insult to modesty, kidnapping, abduction, cruelty by intimate partner or relatives, importation or trafficking of girls, persecution for dowry, dowry deaths, indecency, and all other crimes identified by Indian law. Domestic violence, rape and dowry-related violence are sources of gender violence. According to the National Crime Records Bureau 2013 annual report, 24,923 rape cases were reported across India in 2012. Out of these, 24,470 were committed by relative or neighbor; in other words, the victim knew the alleged rapist in 98 per cent of the cases.

2.10. Political inequalities

This measure of gender inequality considers the gap between men and women in political decision making at the highest levels. On this measure, India has ranked in top 20 countries worldwide for many years, with 9th best in 2013 - a score reflecting less gender inequality in India's political empowerment than Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, France and United Kingdom. From the prime minister to chief ministers of various states, Indian voters have elected women to its state legislative assemblies and national parliament in large numbers for many decades. Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63 per cent, compared to 67.09 per cent turnout for men. In 16 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their rights to vote in April-May 2014 elections for India's Parliament. India passed 73rd and 74rd constitutional amendment in 1993 which provides for 33% quotas for women representation in the local self-government institutions. These amendments were implemented in 1993.

2.11. Importance of gender equality

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home. Within the context of population and development programmes, gender equality is critical because it will enable women and men to make decisions that impact more positively on their own sexual and reproductive health as well as that of their spouses and families. Decision-making with regard to such issues as age at marriage, timing of births, use of contraception and recourse to harmful practices female genital cutting stands to be improved with the achievement of gender equality. However it is important to acknowledge that where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. This would enable them to make decisions and take actions to achieve and maintain their own reproductive and sexual health. Gender equality and women's empowerment do not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. The achievement of gender equality implies changes for both men and women. More equitable relationships will need to be based on a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres of life, including the family, the workplace and the society at large. It is therefore crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is, indeed, often overlooked, because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norms and those of women as a variation of the norm.

2.12. Empowering women

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care,

property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. The gender equality is need of the hour to prevent the violence against women. The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

2.13. Gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Where women's status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. Population and development and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined they are socially determined, changing and changeable. Although they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and change over time.

2.14. Key issues and linkages

Reproductive health: Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a major – but preventable cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.

2.15. Stewardship of natural resources

Women in India are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.

2.16. Economic empowerment

In India more women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere.

2.17. Educational empowerment

About two thirds of the illiterate adults in India are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both

lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

2.18. Political empowerment

Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women.

2.19. Gender equality in the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women

The Convention defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Such situation leads to women empowerment. By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including: to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women; to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life including the right to vote and to stand for election as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children. States parties also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

2.20. Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender concerns in the analysis, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself; a process, not a goal. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in population and development activities. This requires addressing both the condition, as well as the position, of women and men in society. Gender mainstreaming therefore aims to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labor between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to

services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making. Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, does not preclude interventions that focus only on women or only on men. In some instances, the gender analysis that precedes programmed design and development reveals severe inequalities that call for an initial strategy of sex-specific interventions. However, such sex-specific interventions should still aim to reduce identified gender disparities by focusing on equality or inequity as the objective rather than on men or women as a target group. In such a context, sex-specific interventions are still important aspects of a gender mainstreaming strategy. When implemented correctly, they should not contribute to a marginalization of men in such a critical area as access to reproductive and sexual health services. Nor should they contribute to the evaporation of gains or advances already secured by women. Rather, they should consolidate such gains that are central building blocks towards gender equality.

3. Critical Appraisal

Despite major progress, gender inequality persists in many societies and violence against women and girls remains widespread. The lack of access to secondary education and to sexual and reproductive health services for girls and women is a key driver of gender inequality. In addition, discrimination against ethnic minority groups, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and geographically-isolated populations is widespread throughout the world. Gender inequality and other forms of discrimination violate the universal standards of justice enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements. Societies that discriminate against women and social groups obstruct the economic potential of large shares of their populations, which lowers economic growth and limits poverty reduction. Pervasive discrimination and high levels of inequality are also associated with higher risks of conflict and violence.

In response, India has successfully instituted legal and administrative reforms to reduce inequality and realize the human rights of all members of society, with a specific view towards reducing disparities by gender and other status. In some cases, practices that are inconsistent with sustainable development and the realization of human rights, such as child marriage, child labor, and sexual violence, need to be tackled head on. Some countries have also actively promoted social support for children in poor households as a way to ensure that poverty is not “vertically transmitted” from poor parents to their children. Ensuring registration at birth has also proven successful in enhancing equal opportunities and legal rights.

Societies and political systems differ in their responses to inequality. Some resist it strongly through aggressive policies and transfers; others seem to tolerate very high levels of inequality. We call on all societies to ensure that all individuals and households are empowered to fully participate in political, economic, and social life. To ensure sustainable development, economic gains must not only be inclusive, but the quality of social interactions that are based on trust, honesty, voluntarism, and solidarity needs to be enhanced through the promotion of social ethics and the observance of human rights for all.

4. Conclusion

It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment. It is observed that women in India have been subjected to various types of discrimination and disabilities towards enjoyment of benefits of development consequent upon disempowerment. Hence the empowerment of women could be possible through attainment of gender equality. In order to promote gender equality

in socio economic development, the following measures can be considered.

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