

Research note | Women Empowerment

"I raise up my voice -not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back."
-Malala Yousafzai

A 15 year old Pakistani schoolgirl gets shot while traveling home from school. Malala had dared to chronicle the concerns and anxieties of schoolgirls like her under the shadow of the Taliban. She did survive and has emerged as a powerful voice because, as she underlined in her Nobel lecture, it's the voice of many.

Gender inequality has remained a persistent worldwide challenge. The phenomenon of 'missing women' starkly brings home the persistence of gender inequality. According to World Bank 2011 figure, the missing women constitute around 6 million worldwide. Of these, 23% are never born, 10% missing in the early childhood and 21% in the reproductive years. According to World Economic Forum, while nearly 96% of the health gender gap and 93% of the education gender gap in educational attainment have been closed globally, only about 60% of the economic participation gap and 21% of political representation gap have been closed. Such gaps between men and women are the product of 'pervasive and stubborn social norms' that privilege men's access to resources/opportunities over women's. Thus, gender norms and stereotypes have significantly constrained women in exercising its agency.

Empowering women emphasizes on the twin targets of 'voice and agency'. Women empowerment connotes to enhancing the ability of women to access, as Amartya Sen states, the constituents of development - in particular, health, education, economic opportunities, rights and political responsibilities. World Bank's 2001 report 'Engendering Development' underlined the necessity to address gender imbalances in 'rights, resources and voice'.

Women empowerment is important not just because it promotes equity. It is also necessary because empowering women may benefit development. The multiplier effect of girl's education on several aspects of development like reduced fertility rates, lower infant and maternal mortality rates is well recognized. The National Policy on Education, 1986 recognised that the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre-condition for the participation of girls in the educational process. Empowering women will bring changes in decision making that will have a direct impact on development. The participation of women at local government bodies has led to increases in public services delivery such as water and sanitation and enhanced accountability.

Economic development can play a major role in driving down gender inequality. Economic opportunities for women matter not just because they can bring money home. They also matter because such opportunities empower them more broadly in society. In Bangladesh,



the livelihood opportunities at readymade garment industry to a large number of young women have resulted into delayed marriage and lower fertility rates among girls. However, this alone is not sufficient to ensure significant progress in important dimensions of women empowerment.

Socio-economic empowerment of women would require addressing multiple, and often reinforcing, barriers within family and in several formal and informal institutions. This empowerment can bring about a transformation in intra-household decision making process, thus strengthening 'the dignity of individual' that our constitution dearly upholds.

We have already taken many steps but now it's the time, as Malala rightly pleads, to take a leap.

परिवर्तन

ग्राम एवं पो: नरेन्द्रपुर, प्रखण्ड: जीरादेई
जिला: सिवान-841 446, बिहार
फोन: +91 77598 63369 | ईमेल: parivartan@takshila.net

