



Women Empowerment for Sustainable Social Development: Interlinkages and Dynamics

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Gender is a social function that does not exist in a vacuum. It is influenced by caste, class, ethnicity, and race, forming a complex matrix. This article considers the Garhbeta-II Community Development Block (CDB) of West Bengal. The authors have observed that women contribute almost equally to their families as their husbands in the study area. They cannot apply their democratic right to make decisions in their own lives. They have no agency or institution to care for their feelings and ideas. Therefore, the social lives of the women of the region are hampered. Gender inequality impoverishes a nation and creates constraints for holistic social development. Empowerment eliminates disparities and injustices against women. This study aims to a reorientation of the present social structure. It employed a case study method to attain the study goals. A specialized policy framework, special funding, and reservations in every social sector are required to ensure these marginalized women's social exclusion. The administration should focus on women's capacity building to minimize the gender gap.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a crucial role in their families. They have contributed to earning, raising, and caring for their children. They have family obligations, including household work, child-rearing, elderly care, animal husbandry, assisting males in family farming, and working in the informal sector as a daily wagger. This paper addressed the Garhbeta-II Community Development Block (CDB) from Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal. Women's role is unrecognized in our study area due to people's ignorance. It has been found that most married women participated in self-help groups (SHGs), which helps to make them self-reliant. They have a proper work and life balance. In our focused site, all girls are still treated as subordinates. Despite their achievements, women are still time-deprived when it comes to moving from the home to the community. Women in this culture cannot meet their basic needs [1]. They have no say over their daughters' schooling or education and marriage. Because unequal access to essential commodities deprives people of their fundamental rights or the bare necessities of life, only sex-selective discrimination may lead to the abolition of poverty in emerging countries [2]. As a result, intra-household inequality generates a hidden calamity for rural, poor societies. Most people are uninformed of the scope of specialized education and the skill-based job market, where they are unaware of their future [3]. We have shown that households headed by women tend to consume fewer nutrient-dense meals due to having less income to deal with a crisis. Minimum standards for essential services like health care, inadequate educational chances, and low economic potential exacerbate inequalities in gender in the focused area. In the study area, women comprised almost 55% of the workforce in agriculture. Their potential food security, however, still needs to be improved. By recognizing the fundamental needs of people regarding their lives and jobs, social sustainability has a broad dimension to construct sustainable, livable settings that encourage welfare and empower them [4,5]. Empowerment promotes well-being by comprehending what people require from their lives and places of employment. It includes all the criteria and required units to help the social and cultural sphere provide suitable social amenities and mechanisms for women's active involvement [6]. To end poverty at the base, it is required to increase productive employment and capacity

building and create a supply of goods and services. Despite having gender mainstreaming policies in place across the board in all UN organizations, empowering people experiencing poverty is restricted to achieving the SDGs' goal of economic growth [7]. Some initiatives need to change societal norms in response to the enormous amount of unpaid or poorly paid labor that raises concerns with SDG 5.4 [8,9]. Every citizen has the "right to equality before the law," one of their fundamental rights. Article 21-A outlines women's political rights, their 30% reservation in India's three-tiered, decentralized form of government from the gram panchayat, and free obligatory education for all [10].

Access to essential utilities, ownership of inherited land and other property, use of new technology, and availability of financial services from the government are urgently needed in the context of our study site [11]. SDG 5 is focused on empowering the second sex globally to guarantee gender equality. The SDGs aim to address significant issues, including eradicating poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence, to give all people's lives in the 21st century a new shape [10].

2. EMPOWERMENT SERVES AS A PREREQUISITE

In emerging countries, gender inequality is a concerning matter. Because no civilization can be created by disregarding half of its working people from an economic, political, or social standpoint [12]. Access to paid jobs and earnings varies significantly over the entire Indian Territory. Reverse discrimination is the name given to positive discrimination (PD). It is India's quota and reservation system for the underprivileged population [2]. This added benefit alludes to various adaptable programs that aim to increase the value of women in their current society, regardless of caste or class. This bold move encourages their representation from the lowest to the highest levels of democracy [13]. Additionally, it promotes a continuous flow of macro-scale gender-related development.

The racial conflict between affluent people and minorities arises due to beneficial discrimination and, therefore, has both practical and destructive effects on society. The sole method that can expand the space of individuals, groups, or communities to ensure their choices is

empowerment [7,1]. Additionally, it can transform selections into the correct shapes to arrive at appropriate conclusions. The entrusted individuals have various options and the power to take action. We chose West Bengal's Garbeta-II Community Development Block as the subject of our investigation. Education-related barriers, burdensome workloads, inherited property rights, and restricted decision-making still exist for women. Their ability to enhance their quality of life and contribute to the sustainable development of their nation is directly impacted by this [14,15]. This study demonstrates how social exclusion might result from existing socioeconomic inequalities in a good way. The patriarchy's current social networks deliberately worked to undermine the norms. Therefore, empowerment can finally result from education at all levels in rural society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eradicate the subordination system by ending all forms of discrimination against second sex. Women's economic, social, and political character determines women's empowerment in a country. SDG 5 significantly restricts its ability to provide food security, nevertheless.

Target 5. places a strong focus on inheritance and implicit access. However, this access is restricted. Making national laws equally applicable to all citizens eliminates precisely what is frequently required. Women's legal rights are severely hampered by social norms and gender biases in families and communities (Malakar et al. 2023a; Agarwal, 2018). All forms of empowerment, including i) social empowerment, ii) economic empowerment, and iii) ensuring gender justice, were given top priority in the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07). In addition, it establishes female agencies to promote a supportive atmosphere by eliminating all barriers and disadvantages [1]. In the US, it is also known as affirmative action. Similar to Bangladesh's reservation system and India's quota system. Employment fairness in Canada and positive discrimination in the United Kingdom. The term "additional advantage" can relate to various things, such as race, religion, sex, or nationality. All of these are considered to improve the recruitment of underrepresented groups in different social status sectors [16]. They have historically been left out. The quota system's detractors contend that positive discrimination ignores the equality of all individuals. The more fortunate minority groups may experience a rise in racial tension. Furthermore, opponents assert that these

activities frequently fall short of their objectives and have harmful side effects [7]. Among all thinkers, social reformers, and revolutionaries of all time, Swami Vivekananda's contribution to women's emancipation is remarkable. His observations and opinions regarding the empowerment of women are astounding. The sickness of inequality and underdevelopment in Indian society was effectively treated by the outstanding advice he gave. This philanthropist has greatly influenced Indian culture. Swamiji argued that;

"Atma- the soul has no sex, caste, or imperfection."

(Vivekananda 1894, volume 4, Pg no.176).

For the current social order to function, care is a crucial precondition. Without caring, neither an economy nor a culture could exist. Care must be considered a separate right for society's most vulnerable groups [4].

"No society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long. The result is a major crisis."

Nancy Fraser

2.1 In Rural India, Women are Underrepresented as Employers

In 2018, employers comprised only about 3% of the total labour force globally and in high-income nations. Employers' contribution in low-income countries was only 1.6 percent, partially attributed to the preponderance of subsistence activities outside of formally organized economic units. The gender gap among employers is severe globally and across all income levels; only half as many women as men hold this employment status. The caregiving work is called the Purple Economy in developed countries. Moreover, it is well-accepted there. This approach is a norm in a rural society where women's lifestyles, daily duties, and great jobs have been accepted as societal norms. So, women learn to sacrifice their desires for their whole life. However, this system is entirely different in the so-called developed countries. Their perception is very different for women. Therefore, they value caring as a source of GDP [10]. They accepted the ethical criteria of a well-established nation in all its ways. It is time to recognize women as an integral part of society. Both men and women possess the potential to contribute significantly to a nation's development [17].

In wealthy nations, the Purple Economy is the task of providing care. Additionally, it is welcomed there. This strategy is the norm in a rural environment where women's lifestyles, daily responsibilities, and excellent employment have been recognized as social norms [17,6]. Women acquire the ability to live their entire lives making sacrifices. However, in the so-called developed countries, this structure is entirely different. For women, their perception is very different. They value care as a source of GDP as a result. They agreed with all of the established nation's moral standards. It is time to acknowledge the value of women in society. Both men and women have the potential to make essential contributions to the growth of a country.

2.2 Budgeting for Gender Equality Makes Economic Policies more Equitable

Priorities for the political agenda are revealed through gender budgeting. The most important economic policy tool for reforming societies is this budget. It covers the essential areas of expenditure and the variables affecting income generation. To advance equality, it also examines how resources are distributed according to gender and restructures revenue sources. It is imperative to intensify efforts to address the complex barriers women face at home, at work, and in areas that generate resources. This strategy has facilitated the implementation of decision-making processes and the reconfiguration of regional planning. Thanks to its connection, it can be used for budget assessment through budget evaluation. However, the feminist perspective on the care economy is built on a gradual and steady concept of total development. However, this approach could boost women's participation in the workforce.

Women's human rights violations and the price of gender stereotypes. In developing countries like India, where gender inequity is pervasive, it legitimizes male violence against women. Therefore, the fight against patriarchy should be for equal rights and a proportionate share in every area, like male family members, and at the national level. In poor countries, there are no such cost-measuring methodologies or initiatives. Still, in Europe, where matriarchy is inextricably linked to women's recognition and dignity, it is estimated that around 226 billion euros in a calendar year [6]. Women frequently forego their demands, even necessities. They often make adjustments to avoid dealing with men to stop experiencing ongoing physical and psychological

abuse. If their husbands left them, the rural community would constantly threaten to expel them. Due to the financial repercussions, they cannot return to their family home and will be seen as a burden. As a result, the girls start learning to do the same thing. Additionally, they gradually lose sight of their human rights and beliefs and improve opportunities for employment in society. As a result, it contributes to the general feminization of poverty [18-21]. Domestic harassment substantially negatively impacts everyone in the family and their public health, emotional state, and well-being. Therefore, critical public services and moral support are urgently needed to mainstream women in the particular study region to a significant level in all rural areas of India.

This study attempts to understand the condition of women, recognize their demands in rural areas, and dismantle the current patriarchal social networks. After identifying the underlying gaps in every societal layer, we recommended the best course for mainstreaming the area.

3. METHODS

Garhbeta II community development block (CDB) from West Bengal is chosen as the study area. A qualitative framework is followed to help readers better comprehend the current situation. One hundred (100) respondents were interviewed; their ages ranged from 25 to 55. A few issues are closely scrutinized that women face daily. An in-depth interview was conducted with an open-ended survey schedule with ten specific questions regarding educational background, suitable educational environment, intra-family partiality among children, accessibility to home tutors or coaching classes, and the discrepancy in nutritional food intake between boys and girls. The authors have taken cases from five women from different castes like General, SCs, and STs. After that, we tried to demonstrate how various forms of discrimination and the advancement of women's social position are interrelated. The five case studies are written as CA 1, CA 2, CA3, CA4, and CA 5.

4. ANALYSIS

The monthly average income of our respondents from all sources is Rs. 5500. A male earns Rs. 2800/month. In contrast, a woman makes Rs. 2700. Only 10% of the respondents (N=100) completed their higher secondary school (class XII). Their husband also finds himself in the same predicament. 30% of the respondents passed class VIII, while 45% qualified for their

first board exam (class X). In total, 72% of women have an alcoholic husband. Nearly 85% of our female respondents face domestic violence in their in-laws. 60% of women report mental torment from their spouses. Additionally, 48% of our female respondents said their husbands physically harass them on average once a month. According to the 2011 Census, anyone seven years old who can read and write is called literate. As a whole, India has a mean literacy rate of 74.04%. Male literacy is 81.69%, female literacy is 70.54%, with the state average being 76.26%. This is how education works in the studied area [22-24].

4.1 Case Studies

[CA 1] Mrs. Pratima Datta (name changed), 45 years of age. She said:

"I work as an Angawadi assistant in our neighboring village. Therefore, I have a permanent income that I contribute to my family. Except this, I support my husband in our family farmland regularly. Except this, I have two kids; my responsibility is to take of our family as well, as a mother, as a wife, and as a daughter-in-law. Instead of this innumerable contribution towards the family, my husband and in-laws do not acknowledge my efforts."

Mrs. Datta's narration clearly shows that she contributes enough in every possible way. However, her efforts are not recognized by her family.

[CA 2] Mrs. Rupali Das (name changed), 37 years of age. She said:

"I assist my husband in his small business. We belong to the potter community. So, it is our hereditary family business. During the sowing and harvesting period, I support my husband in cultivation. As a woman, I also have regular activities and common responsibilities towards my family. However, I do not get any other recognition for these contributions. It is common, in many times my in-laws harassed me on a mental level."

Mrs. Rupali helps her husband in their family business; they belong to an artisan community (potter). She supports her husband in farming also. Except this, she plays the common role of a woman in rearing and caring activities. However, Mrs. Das still facing violence on domestic grounds.

[CA 3] Mrs. Durga Murmu (name changed), 28 years of age. She said:

"I got married at 15 years old. At that time I was in class VIII. And I am a mother of three. The youngest one is seven years old. Me and my husband usually work as agricultural laborers, earning Rs. 350, which we spend for family. Except this, I collect forest resources like leaves and wood. That I sell and earn Rs. 2500/month on average. Also, we rear some cattle, and from it, we earn also. Instead, I have no right to decide for my family's development."

From Mrs. Durga's narration, it can be said that she belongs to a marginal household. Where they carry out livelihood mainly on daily wagger's job. Other economic activities are: collecting forest products and rearing cattle. The total earning she spends on family and give to her husband. However, she has no democratic right at an intra-household level.

[CA 4] Mrs. Sima Roy (name changed) is 23 years of age. She said:

"I run a small cosmetic shop at our local market where I can earn an average of Rs. 5000/month. Everyday After finishing household work, I come to the shop in the evening (4 p.m to 9 p.m). I got married after completing my 18 years, then I was in BA part I. As a student, I was good. But, my parents compelled me to get married. They do not want to spend money on their daughter's education. My husband works as an electrician. After one year of marriage, I became a mother. My in-laws did not support me to continue my studies. So, with little savings, I opened this shop."

From Mrs. Roy's narration, it can be said that she was forced to get married by her parents. There is intense gender discrimination at the intra-household level and in their society. However, she became self-dependent at her choice.

[CA 5] Mrs. Fulmani Baskey (name changed), 42 years of age. She said:

"We come from the Santal community of West Bengal. I got married when I was in primary school. Our family has eleven members, including my three sons and their family. My husband has some farmland. And it is not sufficient to carry out our livelihood. Due to this, we work as agricultural laborer on other's land on a daily wage basis. Except

this, we are actively involved in cottage industries. My husband is the guardian of our family. We all earn and give it to him. He spends the money as per family demands.

It is clear from Mrs. Baskey's say that gender-based discrimination is prevalent in every community in our study area. Though both men and women are equal and participate equally in economic activities, they do not have the right to maintain family expense budgets or financial matters.

5. DISCUSSION

Therefore, expanding access to lifelong learning in a free, open, and regular manner through a system is essential for promoting it to the rurally disadvantaged community to achieve inclusive, equal, and standard quality education for all people from the five case studies (CA 1 to 5). Because all Indian citizens have a right to get their education. Every child is entitled to a free, compulsory education in school up until the age of 14 under Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution. There is no longer any free or required education after this age in India. We suggest the higher-ups offer free education in the underdeveloped areas of India, at least up to the graduate level. The most crucial thing is to make her population civilized and construct a developed nation since education is the only tool to make people aware and self-reliant. It can improve residents' well-being while providing additional benefits in several socioeconomic areas. In the previous fifty years, the financial well-being of the entire country in OECD countries has increased by an estimated 50% due to better education, according to a statistic. Because more women are enrolling in higher education in various fields and because there is more significant equity across all finance-related industries. Therefore, education must be accessible to everyone throughout their lives, regardless of gender norms.

Because of this, the biased society still has a significant danger of poverty, and some partiality makes women less able to handle hazards. Our study area is underprivileged ladies with no savings in their bank accounts. Nevertheless, all have a bank account for the MGNREGA's 100 days of labour. Nonetheless, they bought a family with their entire savings. They work hard, yet they have little regard for society or family. The administration runs unique initiatives to support education and raise literacy rates among rural marginal populations. However, among the members of the tribal communities in our study

region, there has been no improvement in women's understanding of higher education. Many of them dropped out of school before completing their degrees. However, state government scholarships encourage rural poor and marginalized women to pursue their education. The unpleasant patriarchy in our research area continues to demotivate women. Since no government jobs are available, many respondents wanted to know what would happen to a graduate. So, either complete your schooling through class ten and train the lads in family agricultural mechanics, or leave your state and work in the unorganized sector somewhere. In addition, they marry the females after they turn 18 years old. Because in West Bengal today, getting married before turning eighteen is a crime. In addition, if a girl marries after turning 18, she may be eligible to get Rs 25000 from Rupashree Prakalpa from the West Bengal government.

Women's rights have gained prominence as being essential to accomplishing the SDGs. With the aid of numerous policies and programs, they began to move against the grain of marginal society to eradicate the sickness known as poverty. To assist financially disadvantaged women, setting up loans and programs for practical skill-based employment is helpful. Empowering women's agency encourages them to speak out against injustices.

5.1 Financial Independence and Self-dependency

The government's regulatory laws and policies prohibit discrepancies, and its implementation process should be revised. The administration needs to be devoted to effectively implementing quotas. Only in some matters where reservation is mentioned in official government circulars can one see the allocation of women's involvement. Other than that, it cannot stand out.

The main focus of women's rights and gender equality is on their economic emancipation.

- i) It encompassed the capacity to participate in the labor markets. Equal control over their families' resources to develop women's agency.
- ii) To achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and meet the goals by empowering women, which implies reducing the gender gap.
- iii) More people will be empowered by attaining an educational level, which promotes inclusive economic growth.

The elimination of sex-selective intersectionality leads to the eradication of marginality. Because of gender inequity, women lose their human dignity and opportunities for well-being. They work daily to earn money and support their family, though it is unsure whether she genuinely owns her land. Globally, just 20% of landowners are women. The Indian Constitution states that it is her legal right to do so if she wants to inherit her family's property in the future. However, there are various obstacles to getting their fair portion, such as in-laws or parental residences. Social norms favor male relatives of every woman (SDGs) since the social law denies them an equal part or is pro-men.

6. SUGGESTION

All members (adults) should take equal responsibility for carrying out a family's progress and financial gain. In the meantime, it is crucial to redefine each member's roles to adopt a gender-neutral family and eventually create a healthy culture for the overall development. Marginal communities can achieve complete independence and receive their democratic rights in this way. Therefore, to abolish discrimination based on gender, a stringent, focused, decentralized method should be modified. It is time to alter societal norms. After considering the assertions mentioned above, it is found that raising awareness among ordinary people is crucial for getting the best results. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize at least college-level education and lower the dropout rate. The importance of free lifelong learning for everybody should be encouraged. Free job-related training camps could be arranged to ensure easy access to employment. Another crucial factor is entrepreneurs' available funds and investments in rural setups to boost work prospects. Strict guidelines are necessary for proper policy implementation and deeply penetrating benefits at the bottom level.

The other essential factors in this context are:

- i. Ensure equal opportunity for everyone to work, receive equal compensation, and set working hours,
- ii. Avoiding all forms of inequality and discrimination at the household level,

Additionally, women should actively participate in mainstream economic activities, and it is necessary to abolish all forms of discriminatory cultural practices, particularly to eliminate domestic violence and sex-selective discrimination. It is time to support the vulnerable

members of society by recognizing their importance for long-term social progress.

7. CONCLUSION

It may now assert that every woman has the right to be treated equally and get human rights. Women are still treated as a subordinate part of society, and their significant roles are not acknowledged by their families or the study site. Some measures have been taken and implemented to improve the position of women from the government's end. This study addressed the disadvantageous circumstances faced by the women. It is noticed that all of them actively participate in productive work. Therefore, it is required to treat them equally like men in all fields and eliminate the discrimination against them. The girls of the selected area are equally potential and inspired to participate in developmental activities. However, some social constraints prevent them from achieving their goals. Local administrators and Civil Society Organisations should play a vital role in this context. Because if men and women attain equal status, it will create a fair, dynamic, and progressive society.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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