

A Study on Women in Poverty Eradication-An Indian Perspective

Aasaiyan S

MBA, Department of Management Studies
Bharath Institute of Science and Technology,
Selaiyur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600 073
Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research

ABSTRACT

Poverty eradication and women empowerment are the widely discussed topic all over the world. It has been acknowledged in enumerable studies that the social and economic empowerment of women have a significant positive impact on the poverty eradication and economic development of the country. Therefore the government of India has implemented various schemes to reduce poverty, for empowering poor women and to promote gainful employment. India is the home to above 40 crores of poor did not have incomes to access a consumption basket which defines the poverty line. Of these, 83.36 per cent were in the rural areas. India is home to 33 per cent of the poor fall below the international poverty line. Such a high incidence of poverty is a matter of concern in view of the fact that poverty eradication has been one of the major objectives of the development planning process. Indeed, poverty is a global issue. Its eradication is considered integral to humanity's quest for sustainable development. Reduction of poverty in India is, therefore, vital for the attainment of national and international goals. In India the last decade of the Twentieth century has seen a visible shift in the focus of development planning from the mere expansion of production of goods and services, and the consequent growth of per capita income, to planning for enhancement of human well being. This approach has resulted in the reduction in poverty along with overall improvement in the quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty eradication and women empowerment are the widely discussed topic all over the world. It has been acknowledged in enumerable studies that the social and economic empowerment of women have a significant positive impact on the poverty eradication and economic development of the country. Therefore the government of India has implemented various schemes to reduce poverty, for empowering poor women and to promote gainful employment.

All the poverty alleviation programmes were focused on women as they were economically more disadvantaged than men and as their upbringing and mainstreaming are critical for the economic development of a nation. Rural women have less access to the resources to generate stable incomes. House hold income is a poor measure of women welfare because the distribution of income within the household may be quite unequal. The majority of Indian women reside in rural areas and urban slums and the majority of women workers are engaged in subsistence agriculture and the informal sector with little or no regulation, legislative protection and trade union support. Economic development is a process as well as a stage which is to be reached by designing strategies focusing on building credit worthiness and financial independence among women by removing all the gender specific barriers which prevent women from gaining access to their

rightful share in every spheres of life. There is a realization that the best way to tackle poverty and enable the community to improve its quality of life is through social mobilization of poor, especially women into Self Help Groups. National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) initiated women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in India with the support of local NGOs.

India is the home to above 40 crores of poor did not have incomes to access a consumption basket which defines the poverty line. Of these, 83.36 per cent were in the rural areas. India is home to 33 per cent of the poor fall below the international poverty line. Such a high incidence of poverty is a matter of concern in view of the fact that poverty eradication has been one of the major objectives of the development planning process. Indeed, poverty is a global issue. Its eradication is considered integral to humanity's quest for sustainable development. Reduction of poverty in India is, therefore, vital for the attainment of national and international goals.

KEY CONCEPTS

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women 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 to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.

SELF HELP GROUPS

Self Help Groups are voluntary organizations of the poor at grass root level, which mobilize thrift and disburse micro credit to its members for various purposes such as production, consumption, education etc.,

MICRO ENTERPRISES

Micro enterprise is any income generating activity owned, operated and managed by a group, consists of at least five and not more than fifteen women members. Poverty Eradication and Women's Economic Empowerment Eradicating poverty is a political project, in the sense of disrupting existing power relations. We will need a new set of relationships between people and the state to end corruption, between states, between the private sector and the public sector, between business and labour, between women and men. Notwithstanding high levels of economic growth in Asia, many have been left behind. In too many countries, poverty persists and economic growth has been accompanied by rising disparities in income and opportunities. The global story of growing income inequalities is also observable In Asia, where 0.001% of the population owns 30% of the region's wealth.

This Inequality is a gendered experience. In addition to socio-economic inequalities, deeply entrenched socio-cultural values and practices confine most women to the margins of the economies.

POVERTY IN INDIA

In India the last decade of the Twentieth century has seen a visible shift in the focus of development planning from the mere expansion of production of goods and services, and the consequent growth of per capita income, to planning for enhancement of human well being. The notion of human well being itself is more broadly conceived to include not only consumption of

goods and services in general, but more specifically to ensure that the basic material requirements of all sections of the population, especially those below the poverty line, are met and that they have

access to basic services such as health and education. This approach has resulted in the reduction in poverty along with overall improvement in the quality of life.

ESTIMATES OF POVERTY

➤ OJHA,S ESTIMATE OF POVERTY

Mr. P.D. Ojha estimated the number of persons below the poverty line on the basis of an average calorie intake of 2,250 per capita per day. This entailed monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 15-18 (1960-61) in urban areas and of Rs. 8-11 in rural areas. On this basis, Ojha estimated that 289 million persons (70 per cent of the rural population) lived below poverty line.

➤ DANDEKAR AND RATH'S ESTIMATE OF POVERTY

Dr. V.M. Dandekar and Mr. Nilkantha Rath estimated the value of the diet with 2,250 calories as the desired minimum level of nutrition. They suggested that whereas the Planning commission accepts Rs. 20 per capita per month (or Rs. 240 per annum) as the minimum desirable standard, it would not be fair to use this figure for both the urban and the rural areas. Dandekar and Rath, therefore, suggested somewhat lower minimum for rural population i.e., Rs. 180 per capita per annum and a somewhat higher minimum Rs. 270 per capita per annum for the urban population at 1960-61 prices. There was no change in the percentage of rural and urban poor to the population in the two years it stood at 41 per cent.

➤ MINHAS'S STUDY OF RURAL POOR

Another estimate made by B.S.Minha on the basis 'of.NSS data revealed that if one regards the level of per capita annual consumption expenditure as the bare minimum, then 50 6 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line in 1967-68. However, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of people below the poverty line, we had around 210 million poor people in rural areas in 1967-68, and the corresponding number in the earlier years varied between 206 and 221 million.

➤ BARDHAN'S STUDY OF RURAL POOR

Dr. P.K. Bardhan questioned the validity of the GNP deflator used by Dr B S. Minha in his study. Bardhan suggested the use of agricultural labour price index as a more suitable deflator. His main argument was that the national income deflator covers both the agricultural and manufactured commodities and as such it is very likely to understate the rise in prices paid by the rural poor because the budget of the poor in the rural areas includes a much smaller proportion of the manufactures than the national average.

➤ MONTEK AHLUWALIA'S STUDY OF RURAL POVERTY

Montek Ahluwalia studied the trends in incidence of rural poverty in India for the period 1956-57 to 1973-74. He used the same concept of poverty line i.e., an expenditure level of Rs. 15 in 1960-61 prices for rural areas and Rs. 20 per person for urban areas. The most important feature

of Montek Ahluwalia's study is the marked fluctuation over time in the extent or incidence of rural poverty. The proportion of rural poverty declined initially from over 50 per cent in the mid-fifties to around 40 per cent in 1960- 61, rose sharply through the mid-sixties, reaching a peak in 1967-68, and then declined again.

➤ **B.S. MINHAS, L.R.JAIN AND S.D.TENDULKAR'S STUDY OF POVERTY IN INDIA**

B.S. Minhas, L.R.Jain and S.D.Tendulkar made a study of incidence of poverty for the period 1970- 71 to 1987-88 with the help of NSS data, using adjusted price relatives of the consumers' price index series for agricultural labourers (CPIIW) for rural areas and the combined price relatives' data of consumer price index for industrial workers (CPIIW) and for non-manual employees (CPINM) for urban areas. The data have been processed for 20 states and on that basis, the all-India Headcount Ratios of the poor have been computed and the inter-state variations have been worked out. The study revealed) the incidence of poverty in rural India declined from 58.8 per cent 1970-71 to 50.8 per cent in 1983 and further to 48.7 per cent in 1987- 88. In urban India, the numbers of the poor rose from 50 million in 1970-71 to 77 million in 1987-88. For the Indian union as a whole, the population in poverty grew from 308 million in 1970-71 to 361 million in 1987-88. This implies that development and poverty alleviation programmes did have a healthy effect in reducing the growth rate of the population of the poor.

PLANNING COMMISSION EXPERT GROUP REPORT

The planning Commission constituted in September 1989 an Expert Group under the chairmanship of Prof. D.T. Lakdawala to consider methodological and computational aspects of estimation of proportion and number of poor in India and it was submitted its report in July 1993. The poverty line recommended by the Task Force on projection of minimum needs and effective consumption demand, namely a monthly per capita total expenditure of Rs. 49.09 in rural and Rs. 56.64 in urban rounded respectively to Rs. 49 and Rs. 57 at all-India level at 1973-74 prices be adopted as the base line.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POVERTY ERADICATION

Though poverty is mostly rampant in rural and tribal areas, the poor in India's urban and semi-urban areas also battle against the harsh realities of abject poverty and urban poverty has been on the rise due to rapid urbanization. As a result, strategies that have been adopted to reduce the levels of poverty within India's urban regions include: motivating the people, creating awareness, social mobilization and organizing the urban poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs).

The grouping of 10-20 women to form an SHG is a home grown model for poverty reduction which simultaneously works to empower and improve the lives of its members. SHGs empower women by allowing them the freedom to establish their own group norms such as their independence to set their own levels of saving, loan amounts, meeting times and interest rate levels. In addition to their independence, members also receive the opportunity to build on their skills in leadership, book keeping and other business related aspects of personal development.

Furthermore, members are also provided with an environment in which the social issues they and their communities face can be tackled. Thus overall, the SHG movement, in its attempt to reduce poverty levels in urban areas, relies on three major principles for poverty reduction; self-help, mutual benefit and self-reliance.

COORDINATED UN ACTION FOR POVERTY ERADICATION

To help rural women escape poverty, in 2012 UN Women joined with the World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agriculture Development to launch a joint programme to empower poor rural women through economic

integration and food security initiatives. The initiative aims to empower rural women to claim their rights to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, and to participate in shaping laws, policies and programmes.

KNOWLEDGE GATEWAY

During the High-Level week of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly, UN Women, with support from the Government of Canada, launched the Knowledge Gateway for Economic Empowerment. The new online platform is an open global community for knowledge mobilization, innovation and partnerships. It seeks to re-vitalize women's economic empowerment by building connections and bringing together people who need resources with those that have them. The portal will feature e-discussions, interviews, videos and other resources on rural women, food and poverty reduction from 15-25 October.

Recent reports from UN Women and ILO show:

- a. Over the past few decades, globally women's labour force participation has stagnated, and the gender gap in labour force participation rates remains very high at 27 percentage points. And we have seen in countries like Japan that access to education, while a prerequisite, does not guarantee equality of opportunity or value in the labour market.
- b. Women are over-represented in informal employment, enduring poor and sometimes dangerous working conditions, lack of social protection, and low pay.
- c. The global gender pay gap is significant at 23 percent – this discrimination robs women of the ability to adequately support them and their families, to pull themselves out of poverty, enjoy an adequate stand of living and save for retirement. All of this also limits women's access to assets and resources such as land, technology and credit. Alongside income poverty, because of the structure of gender and social norms, and responsibilities for the care economy, women are also time poor.

UN Women marks three UN observances that reflect women's key role in development, beginning with International Day for Rural Women on 15 October, World Food Day on 16 October and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October.

Rural women are key agents for development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face. These are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide.

UN Women supports the leadership and participation of rural women in shaping laws, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security, and better rural livelihoods. Training equips them with skills to pursue new livelihoods and adapt technology to their needs.

Given equal resources, women could contribute much more. FAO estimates that if women farmers (43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries) had the same access as men, agricultural output in 34 developing countries would rise by an estimated average of up to 4 per cent. This could reduce the number of undernourished people in those countries by as much as 17 per cent, translating to up to 150 million fewer hungry people.

According to new estimates, about 870 million people, or one in eight worldwide, did not consume enough food on a regular basis to cover their minimum dietary energy requirements over the period 2010 to 2012. The vast majority live in developing countries.

Many of the world's most poor are women. Poverty eradication is a key challenge for rural women. New poverty estimates from the World Bank show that the proportion of people living on less than USD 1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010, across every developing region. Yet, 1.2 billion people are still living in extreme poverty.

Investments in care services can have a triple dividend – first, ensuring better public services; second, providing greater support for the unpaid care work that is done within the home; and third, making care services an engine for the generation of decent employment for women and men working in the care sector. In Addis Ababa last year, Member States agreed on a global framework for financing sustainable development. UN Women strongly advocated for the Addis Ababa Action Plan on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment which proposes a number of strategic policy options to mobilize resources at national and international level. Let me address four of these:

First, all policy actions at the national level must be used to mobilize resources for gender equality. These include realigning macroeconomic policies to increase fiscal space, improving tax compliance, and addressing both the implicit and explicit gender biases in tax systems. It is equally important to ensure that resources generated through tax are used to advance gender equality and women's rights. Implementing gender-responsive budgeting and strengthening accountability mechanisms will ensure more efficient, transparent, and effective financing.

Second, States must take measures to eliminate gender based discrimination in access to and control over bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, and giving women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, right to land ownership, natural resources and access to technologies. Third, official development assistance can provide additional sources of revenue for gender equality and women's empowerment. All developed countries should meet their commitments and ensure a stronger focus on gender equality in their ODA. Fourth, for financing for gender equality to be truly transformative it requires efforts by all actors to address both the structural causes and consequences of gender inequality. This cannot be done without the full and equal participation of women and women's organizations in decision-making at all levels. And while States have the primary responsibility to deliver results for women, private finance will play an important role in financing the 2030 Agenda. Pay your taxes and pay decent wages

CONCLUSIONS

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept implying lack of income, lack of resources and deprivation of means of livelihood. For uplifting poor women from indigence, opportunities for them for economic participation become necessary. Efforts under the promotion of the SHG urban

movement have worked to improve the lives of poor women by enhancing their ability to bargain, manage their own institutions independently and gain access to better livelihood opportunities. This in turn, has increased their financial security and in so doing, has enabled many women to come out of poverty creating stability not only in their own lives but also for those within their communities.

On review of all the poverty alleviation programmes, one gets the impression that these programmes are not benefiting the poor in terms of increasing their income. For example, the PDS

is plagued with seepage, corruption, high administrative cost and targeting errors. Self-employment is better utilized by the non-poor or those who are above BPL. Wage employment programme is caught in administrative delays leading to poor utilization of the allocated funds. All these factors have been used by some economists to argue against these programmes and to suggest the winding up the programmes.

Looking at purely narrow economic point of view is not the right approach to poverty alleviation. Poverty does not mean not having enough income alone. Poverty means not having access to a whole lot of services like education, health services, water supply, sanitation and so on. It also means loss of status in the community, exclusion from certain social functions, and a sense of inferiority in the group or community. In short, poverty means marginalization of an individual or household in the community. Economic participation of women leads to their better position in the family. The ADS and CDS officials should monitor the functioning of the NHGs at the base level for strengthening them. Leadership quality and capacity building can be improved among the group members only when all members are willing to accept the role as leader on rotation basis. Otherwise empowerment may confine only to existing group leaders along, which is against the democratic functioning of a group.

REFERENCES:

1. A.P.Fernandez- Rural Management systems series, Paper 32. A concept paper on Federations of self help groups. MYRADA, Bangalore, India.
2. APMAS (2007) SHG federations in India – A publication of APMAS, Hyderabad, India
3. APMAS (2006) Status of SHG federations in Andhra Pradesh, APMAS, Hyderabad India
4. Gaurav Datt and Ashwani Mahajan, Indian Economy, S.Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2011, p.370.
5. Dandekar, V.M. and N. Rath, Poverty in India, Dimensions and Trends, Economic and Political Weekly, January 2, 1971 and January 9, 1971
6. Minhas, B.S., Rural Poverty, Numbers Games and Polemics, Indian Economic Review, New Series, April 1971, p. 102.
7. Montek Ahluwalia, Rural Poverty and Agricultural Performance in India, The Journal, of Development Studies, 1977, p.319.
8. Gaurav Datt & Martin Ravallion, Regional Disparities, Targeting and poverty in India, 1989, World Bank Paper W.P.S 375, p.37.
9. Report of the Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor, Planning Commission, Economic Survey, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 1993, p. 36.

10. Abhijit Sen, Estimates of Consumer Expenditure and its Distribution – Statistical Priorities after NSS 55th Round, Economic and Political Weekly, December 16, 2000.
11. Mahendra Dev S. and Ravi, Poverty and Inequality: All-India and States, 1983- 2005, Economic and Political Weekly, February 10, 2007, p. 519-20.
12. Mahendra Dev, and C.Ravi, Revising Estimates of Poverty, Economic and Political Weekly, March8, 2008, p.9.