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GENDER EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

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Prospects for Assessing Inclusiveness among Women through Social Capital and Social Support

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Abstract—Well-being as an outcome of inclusiveness has two personal dimensions- people's satisfaction and a sense of their social well-being. Measuring their skill improvement, health status and their behaviour through personal improvement can be taken as indicators. Such indicators can be qualitative or quantitative and exhibit the presence or change in subjective things and/or objective culture. This paper concentrates on the use of the acronym of AIM. by authorities in arriving at certain criteria in terms of social capital and social support, for assessing the extent of identification and internalization by women groups regarding their own status of being 'included' in a social setting.

Keywords: Wellbeing, social support, social capital, inclusiveness

The Constitution of India confers equal rights to all citizens irrespective of sex, but in reality women suffers in all spheres of socio- economic life because of ignorance of their legal rights, lack of legal facilities and absence of strong women groups and opportunities. Several causes as social, attitudinal institutional, inadequate employment opportunities, training, insufficient information and others hold back women from participating in social and income generating activities. Women and girls, thus emerge as discriminated and excluded 'classes' in the society.

Women in South Asia, especially form the most excluded and discriminated segment of the population. This state of affairs can be attributed to three different societal structures and their perspectives on women, namely, patriarchal structure, matriarchal structure and structural exclusiveness of women.

PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

Patriarchy is reported as a major cause, as it restricts women in many ways. Limiting women's ownership and control of property and other economic resources, including the products of labour, women's mobility, access to education and information- all are pointers where 'Patriarchy' assumes the role of a 'stumbling block'. The experiences of a majority of women are recognised to be grounded in both poverty and patriarchy. Their combined efforts subject women to exclusion and exploitation.

MATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

Like the previous one, this structure too though affords advantages in terms of property rights and of choosing their husband (for instance the Khasis), lays a host of restrictions on women in terms of mobility, association, reputation etc. Harassment, violence, dowry and associating every move of the female with character are interwoven among these groups' customs too. They (customs) have an adverse effect on girl's image of themselves, their sense of self-worth and the attitude of behaviour of others (including family members) towards them.

Table 1: Perceptions about the Nature of Men and Women

Women	Men
submissive	ambitious
sensitive	rational
gentle	courageous
emotional	strong
weak / reserved	decisive
sexy	analytical
nurturing	manipulative
jealous	bold
humble / family oriented	goal oriented
patient	eloquent

ver the past decades, all those interested in women's studies have focussed on attitudinal findings in the relationship between men and women.

ie very perception of women by men (as given in Table. 1) reflects the extent of exclusion and domination women are subjected to. Through these ways, patriarchal and matriachal structures create the enduring gaps in terms of opportunities available to men and women.

Rural Exclusion

with the mindset, there is need to note the structural exclusion of women too, to understand the reasons of exclusion of women in India (Table. 2)

Table 2: Profile of Women in India

Parameters	Existing Status
Sex ratio	933
Female literacy rate	54.1
Female literacy rate of dalit women	23.7
Female literacy rate of tribal women	18.1
Enrolment of girl child	48.1
Enrolment of girls by primary school	45.97
Enrolment of girl middle school	65.1
Enrolment of girl high school	76.9
Female labour force participation in agricultural sector	81.2
Female labour force participation in unorganised sector	96.3
Female labour force participation in services sector	7.6
Female labourers	41.9

Source: Census of India 2001

Structural inequalities thus persist and pervade the very existence of women, as their being born itself is a stigmatised mark. Nevertheless, who are the so called 'excluded'?

In the Indian context, various activists project the following groups as the most excluded.

Rural groups: Dalits/untouchables/lower castes, tribals/ adivasis/indigenous people, religious and caste minorities, the most backward castes and women and children - all fall in this group.

Urban groups: Agricultural labourers, marginalised farmers, child labourers, domestic workers, informal workers/ unorganised sector workers, contract workers, plantation workers, fisher communities, scavengers, rural and forest-based communities, vernacular-speaking social groups, people with disabilities etc., fall in this category. In both the groups women feature visibly well.

What is 'exclusion' as a conceptual framework defined?

It is the denial of the right to representation and participation in the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of society and polity

It is deprivation of the right to mobility, right to practice one's religion and the right to organise and mobilise.

It is the denial of ownership, access and control over resources

It is the denial of rights over one's labour and rights over one's reproductive resources

It is the denial of opportunities for education, health care, housing, public amenities, recreational facilities and spaces, basic needs etc.

It is the denial of social interaction and denial of access to social spaces

It is the denial of human dignity

It is the denial of constitutional and human rights

The principle factor that supersedes all these is the prevalence of inequality visible Among the population Themselves.

The response to exclusion is inclusion. - A truly active proposition. Inclusion has to analyse and understand the processes and outcomes of exclusion and find out mechanisms for inclusion.

WHAT IS INCLUSIVENESS?

It is a concept that encompasses equity, equality of opportunity and protection in market and employment transitions. It is an essential ingredient of any successful growth strategy? It focuses on economic growth, by utilising more fully parts of the labour force trapped in low productivity activities or completely excluded from the growth process. Thus the thrust is on economic growth which is necessary and a crucial condition for poverty reduction.

In the Indian context, the role of women and the girl child towards economic growth is essentially demarginalised. The birth of a son in India is deemed as insurance, but a girl baby's arrival is viewed in terms of an economic predicament, a liability and above all personified as the 'servants of the household'. They are thus treated as a 'necessary nuisance'- a being that has to stay active but dumb, a necessity but a waste. They are left with traumatic triggers and emotional numbing. The plight is all the more pronounced among families in the lower socio- economic strata.

Human beings must be able to live as subjects of History, not victims of Destiny, it s said. Contrarily, women and children in such families become just victims of destiny – by sheer virtue of their gender – rather than subjects of history. They live someone else's history as a passive existence. To be a human is to be a participant in a conversation, not as a recipient of instruction. The structural constraints existing in India, but force women and children (girls) to belong to the second category. This state of affairs has to be changed. This sort of discrimination, inequality has to be wiped off. For this inclusiveness in all aspects, from being given a status, to including them in major decision making activities has to become a reality.

The perspective of gender inequality gives one a real insight into asymmetries and deprivation of other kinds as well. Inequality may not be an undifferentiated whole, nor a mechanical mixture of desperate components that do not interact with the other or in any way resemble each other. The disturbing fact is the spread of economic and technological apartheid as parallels to gender inequality. These inequalities generally never are visible to the naked eye, but prevail in the under-surface exerting a highly charged force. Such undercurrents have come to stay from history.

Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, a feminist economist, feels that gender issues have to be examined intellectually. Even less extreme expressions on inequality, he exclaims, were confounded by a prevailing attitudinal fog, because, women made 'implicit opinions' that men were more focussed and result oriented than themselves – the weaker sex. Is this proof enough to understand that gender inequality survived and flourished, working in a valuation mist that engulfs everybody and worked by making allies out of the 'victims' – the women themselves? So women themselves have been partially responsible for this state of affairs and underrating themselves by virtue of their gender differentials. Has it always remained the same?

A Glimpse into the Women's 'Past'

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful.

Portrayal of Indian Womanhood

Historical circumstances and values in India focus women's issues to be different from the western feminist rhetoric. The idea of women as 'powerful' is accommodated into patriarchal culture through religion and in matriarchal culture through relegation of certain powers. This has helped retain a visibility in all sections of society by providing women with traditional 'cultural spaces'. Quite contrary to the western notion that relates self to competitive individualism, women (individuals) in India are usually considered as just one part of the larger social collective, dependent for their survival upon cooperation and self denial for the greater good.

Modernity ushered in by colonial venture brought in its wake, concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights. The frothing concept of nationalism and introspection of discriminatory practices brought about social reform movements related to caste and gender relations. Unlike the western feminist movement, India's movement was initiated by men and later joined by women. Some of the most influential men involved were, Dr. Ambedkar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and a host of others. The efforts of these men succeeded in abolishing sati, child marriage, disfiguring of widows on the one hand and promoting women's education and obtaining legal rights for women to own property on the other.

Enabling Feminism among Women

In a period when men feminists came to the forefront the struggle against colonial rule intensified. Nationalism became the pre-eminent cause and claiming Indian superiority became the tool of cultural chauvinism. At this juncture, Mahatma Gandhi, legitimised and expanded Indian women's public activities by initiating them into the non-violent movement. He exalted their feminine roles of caring, self-abnegation, sacrifice and tolerance and carved a niche for those in public space. Subsequently the women-only organisations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged. Women started grappling with the issues relating to the scope of women's political participation, franchise, communal awards and leadership roles in political parties. The models of feminism in India like Sultana Razia, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and many others boldly came out and fought for the 'women's cause' with an indelible signature.

Women's participation in the freedom struggle developed their critical consciousness about their role and status, resulting in the introduction of franchise and civic rights for women in the Indian constitution. There was provision for women's upliftment through affirmative action, maternal and child care provision, equal pay for equal work etc. Yet the concept of equality remained quite alien in India. The concept gained a meaning and was made an operational principle only after the constitution of the democratic government. It then granted equality and freedom from discrimination based on gender or religion. All these still apply only for those in the higher economic strata. It could create only feeble steps for those in lower rung.

The five year plans, hitherto, have strived to make provisions for health, education, employment and welfare to women. The Eleventh Plan Approach paper, now accords as a key element, the strategy for 'inclusive growth'. Inclusiveness in growth cannot be achieved when the governmental policies are largely skewed towards exclusive growth such as the SEZs, displacement without resentment, lack of access to education and employment for the so called 'weaker sex' and the question of human dignity and equality. The dire need to peruse not only on deprivation, but also on such general matters as to the standard on how to think about 'rights' in general, especially for any deprived group, women or any underprivileged group, gains special address. Vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, to tribal women and internally displaced people (due to many reasons like refuge, devastations etc), also have to be engulfed under a common umbrella and provided with an enabling environment.

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT?

Central in the uneducated and rural sections of the society, which forms the major portion of the total population, women are seen as economic burdens. Their economic contribution in agriculture, service and industrial sector are totally neglected. Similarly, their contributions to productivity remain invisible. Filial and domestic roles are unfairly overlooked. Studying the conceptual formulation of the connection between household obligations, outside work and the division of benefits and chores of life, *per se* becomes imperative. Evidently, gender equality should be assessed not based on an economic or psychological scale of utilities but primarily in terms of the real capabilities, the powers, they can do or be what they value as of constitutive importance. This can vary from such elementary as not being subjected to physical abuse or violent assault and the freedom to lead unsubjected life to having the opportunity to develop one's talents and to achieve self-respect of others. So,

'power' is directly involved in the assessment of gender equality and how women deem themselves to be called 'included'.

In the making of women, some of the main reasons that girls are less likely to reach optimal level of education and acquire that 'power', include the fact that they are needed to assist their mothers at home. They have been raised to behave that a life of domestic work is their destined occupation, have illiterate mothers who cannot educate them, have an economic dependency on men and are sometimes subjected to child marriage. Female population also show a ten per cent higher dropout rate than male from middle and primary schools, as well as lower levels of literacy than men. A major obstacle for achieving the target of 'equality and inclusiveness' for women, could be broken if at all their access to education increases in their literacy level, thereby could be promoted and enhanced.

The next blocking stone in their path is their poor representation in the Indian work force. An unfortunate reality is that the high illiteracy rate among women confines them to lower paying, unskilled jobs with less job security than men. Still worse is the likelihood of being paid less for the same amount and type of work as men in highly similar domains (say, Agriculture). Ridiculous of this gynocentric - Vs andro - centric society!!! – A major cause for 'Exclusion'.

One of the fundamental causes behind exclusion is the denial of ownership, access and control over resources. Hence the demand for ownership, access and control over resources is emerging as a collective claim.

The main instrument for sustainable and inclusive growth is assumed to be 'productive employment'. 'Employment growth' generates new jobs and income for the individual - from wages or some form of employment - while productive growth has the potential to lift the wages of those employed and returns to the self employed. The ability of the individuals to be productively employed depends on the opportunities to make full use of available resources as the economy evolves over time. This therefore establishes the need to strengthen the productive resources and capacity of the women on the labour supply side as well as ways to open up fresh opportunities for productive employment on the labour demand side. Focus should now be on enhancing women's skills for productivity.

QUESTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND IDENTITY

Women from socially disadvantaged / vulnerable groups are mostly forced into menial jobs. The concept of dehumanising jobs is highly prevalent among women workers. In many remote villages, menial scavenging by women is still a common scene. But what is expected is job opportunities that ensure efficiencies and human dignity paving for removal of social structures and disparities. A step forward to reach the target is to bring human dignity to labour that relies on technology and its inherent efficiencies. Such combined efforts on widening possibilities for education and income generation would improve the much wanted well-being of these women.

Creation of meaningful job is the only panacea. Contrarily in democratic India, political institutions still attempt only to create jobs through inefficiencies and give an illusion of social development, of no tantamount to the maintenance of the status quo. The efficiency factor, thus often takes a back seat. Governmental schemes aimed at improving the plight of women just end up landing women in 'inefficient' jobs that require no skill and thinking powers, for instance the NREGA. These points do not generally affect the masculine group.

The situation is all the more pronounced with differences in the power within gender relations. Individuals posing as foes for females need not come from the exterior; they can be from within the house. On the 'casual' side of inequality, one type of power asymmetry prevails. Sen calls this 'power' which has a central role as 'cooperative conflict', which forms a core for understanding gender inequality within the family and ultimately in the society at large. Both men and women, in this perspective, cherish congruent and conflicting interests affecting family living. In all probable variations in the presence and use of power of different kinds from physical, (brutal strength) to institutionally mediated powers (arising from notes within/ outside the household) thus surface

or women as the unequal partners. To infuse this power to exercise equal rights and opportunities on par with men, women have to be empowered. Efforts should be laid down to increase their capability and autonomy, which would automatically decrease the threat and vulnerability associated with gender issues. Initiatives of this kind can enhance the physical and mental well-being of the women too. Joseph (2005) views that there are encouraging signals that indicate formal recognition of the need to get beyond the narrow pre-occupation with the material conditions of women's lives and to focus attention on issues relating to the equally important questions of the position of women in society.

CAN WOMEN CONTRIBUTE?

Problem solving is the eighth life skill recommended by the WHO. It is essential that women themselves identify the problems, explore the intensity, and recognise the goal to be achieved, look at the various alternatives, select a plausible solution and implement the solution to action. Albeit, this tantamount to empowerment, it can happen only with women raising their voices for education and economic independence.

The best way is to, synergise with neighbours and friends and form a cohesive group. A local NGO can be taken to trust. With such a social empowerment, an individual's (women's) power for life skill orientation can be enhanced multi-fold. The feasible option, then lies in starting an SHG (Self Help Group), by bringing the local women into its fold. The fruits of the efforts of the group can be utilized to satisfy the wants of the local community. This practice would not only become a life style in the long run, but would also buttress the concepts of social and individual well-being, social capital and the social support. Their decisions should have a mystic vision, spiritual/ political idealism and a passion.

CAN THE GOVERNMENT INTERVENE?

Desired results can be achieved when the Government can allocate more funds for social sector spending. Policy makers in India generally use the poverty line benchmarking to fashion their quick fix social policy using the poverty line to define those in need of assistance, and in the process exclude those living near or just above it. Income alone cannot be used as a parameter. It should embrace the physical and mental health of the women too. In many families, especially rural ones, the girls and women face nutritional discrimination within the family and are anaemic and malnourished. These schemes, which they envisage/ implement, obviously overlook, for instance, the majority of population who is not covered by health insurance. Such schemes should be an 'all inclusive' one. Quality education, apart from financial inclusion, should hold the key to opening up of opportunities for women to empower themselves. For this there needs to be an awakening among women, in the first instance and progress has to be studied using specific indicators.

Indicators can be either **quantitative** – having to do with a quantity or number – or **qualitative** – having to do with the qualities or characteristics of what is being studied. Quantitative indicators help to answer questions about things that are inherently expressed in numbers like how many, how often, how much, etc. Qualitative indicators help demonstrate, describe or measure "that something" that has not been defined. Some of them can help to identify **objective outcomes**.

Other indicators can help to show the presence of, or changes in, **subjective things**: ideas, opinions, attitudes (e.g. whether or not women feel they have more self confidence). Where qualitative indicators are used to illustrate or demonstrate that something has happened, or to capture a process of change, questions can also be asked in a more open-ended way, and can be more open to a person's dual interpretation.

Often, indicators of the two types of outcomes – subjective and objective – are of equal importance to the situations, so it is useful to capture change or progress in both ways. One benefit of using qualitative indicators is that it can be possible to compare people's feelings, attitudes, and perceptions to determine in order to measure what is often referred to as distance travelled for job site, fetching water -

sort of time series studies. This is progress that is often difficult but very worthwhile to understand and demonstrate.

What makes a good indicator?

It's essential to develop processes that help to understand why things happen and provide more frequent feedback. As a complement to these, it is important to choose indicators of performance, quality, and outcomes that are within one's scope to measure and use. Four criteria for choosing indicators are summarised by the acronym AIMS:

- Action focused (A). Does knowing about the concerned issue help do things better or more effectively?
- Important (I). Is it relevant and a priority?
- Measurable (M). Can information be obtained that tells something about the effects they have had?

Simple (S). Is it clear and direct enough to be understood by all? Is it easy enough to get information without expert assistance?

Promoting people's well-being should be considered one of the ultimate aims of society alongside social justice and ecological sustainability. By 'well-being' it is meant people experience of their quality of life. In this concept it can be broken down into component parts showing how even 'soft' outcomes like a change in a person's well-being can be measured by social enterprise.

MODEL OF WELL-BEING HAS TWO PERSONAL DIMENSIONS

People's satisfaction with their lives: Their sense of personal development, sometimes called positive functioning or personal expressiveness and a social context

Their social well-being: Their sense of belongingness to their communities, a positive attitude towards others, feeling that they are contributing to society and engaging in what could be called 'pro-social behaviour' and 'pro-active contribution', for their own development.

Action Strategies Suggested

- With globalisation and liberalisation, India should also import the ethos of social spending (education, training, healthcare and employment benefits) to offset the potential negative impacts. While concentrating on free markets and free trade, the government should also look at the beneficiaries in our own country
- Devise supportive services by means of a safety net for women. This will on its own accord ensure their children in schools that can end the cycle of social deprivation
- Give good anchorage for developing skilled and semi-skilled jobs through finance and training jobs which have a perennial demand, but those which have a perennial dearth of supply
- Provide a prescient understanding of the need for activism, employing a variety of means such as political agitation, public debates and monitoring of inequities and abuses
- Encourage NGO intervention to form SHGs and act as effective intermediary. They can form NGO-led micro finance programmes that can foster and nurture social capital and social support to realise the dream of inclusiveness

Inclusiveness, therefore must involve the four attributes of *opportunity, capability, access and security* for women to improve themselves. Governmental and NGO inputs coupled with positive participation and involvement of community elders and the women themselves would lead the country not only in the path of economic / social progress, but also view women in a different perspective where they on their own would contribute to self well-being. To enable them reach this goal, women themselves should start identifying the concepts of social capital and social support available in their context.

ings; which they can fruitfully make use of for self and communal good. This attempt can enable policy framers to assess the status of women's well-being too – a two way approach to 'inclusive growth'.

Setting formidable challenges and determined actions and implementing them exercising collective endeavour would help realise our dreams in a befitting manner.

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