

Women Empowerment And Leadership

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Abstract: Leadership is a process whereby individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. It is a process which catalyses change. Leadership is not restricted to a formally designated leader in a group rather it occurs in groups and directs groups of individuals to accomplish a common task or goal. In the social sector, leadership means being proactive on social issues for the larger benefit of society. Different theories and studies have thus looked at leadership around traits, qualities and attributes, behaviours and styles.

I. RIGHTS OF THE GIRL CHILD

All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. These would relate specifically to strict enforcement of laws against prenatal sex selection and the practices of female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution etc. Removal of discrimination in the treatment of the girl child within the family and outside and projection of a positive image of the girl child will be actively fostered. There will be special emphasis on the needs of the girl child and earmarking of substantial investments in the areas relating to food and nutrition, health and education, and in vocational education. In implementing programmes for eliminating child labour, there will be a special focus on girl children.

II. WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

In the new leadership debate, strengthening women's leadership is a necessary pre requisite for facilitating women's empowerment. Strengthening women's leadership in the social, economic and political milieu thus becomes essential for removing gender inequality and facilitating women's empowerment.

For political empowerment of women in India, provision has been made in the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment

Acts for the reservation of one third of the seats for women. Beginning with the first round of elections to panchayats after the states passed conformity legislations in 1994, nearly three million elected women have acquired legislations in 1994 and nearly three million elected women have acquired a place in local bodies.

Women were more actively involved in decision-making and implementation of schemes in their own constituencies/wards. In many instances they used their elected authority to address critical issues such as children's education, drinking water facilities, family planning facilities, hygiene and health, and aspects of village development.

The realities of gender inequality restrict the Women Elected Representatives (WER) ability to exercise their leadership. The responsibilities to meet the household subsistence requirements, mobility restrictions and limited support structures restricted their social interaction and participation in local self-governance. Internalised low self-esteem has made them passive, dependent on men in matters relating to governance. Lack of awareness and low education / illiteracy would need to be tackled for raising their self-image.³

In addition to political leadership women are also playing important leadership roles in socio and economic spheres. These include leadership of women's collectives like Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The formation of SHGs has been promoted for economic and social empowerment. It has been expected that SHGs will be a means to promote income generation activities and micro credit, thereby making them

economically independent. It was also expected that economic independence would also help women to be involved in the decision-making process at the household level and community level.

As studies have shown that focusing only on the economic needs of women will not facilitate change in the women's social as well as political position. An integrated approach to women's sphere and in the socio-economic context can have a synergistic effect-each strengthening and complementing the other, thus contributing to women's empowerment, as well as effective development.

In recent years the Government of India (GoI) has recognized the need for building capacity of WERs. The Plan document emphasises the participation of people, especially the participation of people, especially women groups at all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring and considers this as a prerequisite for good governance.

Any analysis of the outcomes of the initiatives on women's empowerment entails understanding (a) whether capacity building initiatives are instrumental in expanding spaces in women's lives and (b) to what extent the expanded spaces reduce gender based inequalities. This section discusses the outcomes resulting directly or indirectly from the capacity building interventions.

Formation of new women groups or strengthening of existing ones led to considerable increase in women's participation in public forums such as gram sabha, ward sabha, block panchayat meetings etc. It also helped in creating a synergistic between women women forums WERs to raise the issues and interact with government officials.

Some women networks contributed in building an enabling environment for women's participation in the Mahila Gram Sabha as in Maharashtra and general gram sabha. They provided support to WERs. The WERs associated with women women groups and networks, to understand the problems of other women and to collectively discuss how the panchayat could help them out. The discussion helped WERs plan the agenda for periodic panchayat meetings and in the gram sabha. In some places initiatives were taken to mobilise collective monitoring of basic services like ration shops, incentives collective monitoring of basic services like ration shops, incentives provided by schools, payment of wages under NREGA etc. In Jharhand, women leaders supervised and monitored construction works undertaken in the villages under different schemes. The women members of different forums have carried out surveys on many issues and shared their findings with district authorities. They have submitted petitions and memoranda for speedy actions. They successfully mobilized women's participation in the gram sabha, pallsabha, and panchayat meetings at the block and district levels.

Some interventions facilitated women to move from being passive beneficiaries to active citizens. Its impact showed three levels of empowerment: power within, power to and power with. At the power within level a key impact is the observation that women leaders have developed an awareness of one's own potential. They are confident, sensitive and informed persons. At the power to level the project has

expanded women's control over their resources and decision-making processes. Access to networks of women outside their family and access to leadership positions have empowered them. At the power with level, women have intervened collectively in many institutions: family, community and PRIs. The training programmes have demonstrated their newly acquired skills and confidence in dealing with people in authority. They are emerging as pressure groups, negotiating confidently with government officials, and outsiders. They are transforming the agenda of governance by ensuring that the survival needs of poor women are given priority. The fact that women are making their voice heard is an indication that there is a change in women's self-perception. The WERs who were part of the collectives were using their knowledge on PRIs to effectively address their panchayat's social development issues and in this effort they are receiving support from their women gram sabha members.

India continues to rank third lowest in the proportion of business leadership roles held by women for the third year consecutively. According to a global survey by Grant Thornton, only 17 percent of senior roles are held by women in India. The survey of 5,500 businesses in 36 economics further adds that 41 percent of the Indian businesses surveyed have no women in leadership roles, 7 points higher than the last year.

III. CONCLUSION

Women representatives are trailing in decision-making in rural governance. The capacity building of these bodies needs special attention. The provision should be made for special training to the women representatives at the grassroots as well as at the State and National levels. In today's large organization, as women climb up the corporate ladder they vanish. While the statistics vary slightly around the world, this is an extremely consistent pattern. At the lowest levels, more than half of the employees in organizations are female. When it comes to the barriers that may be holding women back from achieving greater representation in the top leadership ranks, women are much more likely than men to point to societal and institutional factors such as the country not being ready to elect more female political leaders and women being held to higher standards than men in business and in government.

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