



Empowered Women Thriving Communities: A Symphony of Socioeconomic Advancement

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ABSTRACT: This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between socioeconomic development and empowerment through a participatory approach. It emphasizes the essential role of community involvement in decision-making processes and project implementation as a means to achieve sustainable development outcomes. The study investigates the concept of empowerment within the realm of participatory development, accentuating the critical contribution of local communities in instigating change and enhancing their livelihoods. By employing various case studies and theoretical frameworks, the paper elucidates the benefits, challenges, and strategic approaches pertinent to participatory development initiatives. Furthermore, it evaluates the significant roles played by governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in facilitating participatory development, while outlining important considerations for ethical and effective practice. In conclusion, this paper offers valuable insights and actionable recommendations aimed at advancing participatory approaches to effectively tackle socioeconomic disparities and empower marginalized communities, ultimately driving meaningful and transformative change.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, development, socioeconomic, sustainable, communities

I. INTRODUCTION

Empowering women entails establishing an environment that allows them to make independent choices for their personal development and for the overall advancement of society [1]. This process involves enhancing women's control and participation in decision-making, thereby achieving equality with men across various domains, including political, economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres. Historically, women have been as integral to societal development as men. The status, contributions, and engagement of women within a society serve as key indicators of a nation's progress. The absence of women's active participation in

national affairs hinders social, economic, and political advancement. Women make up half of the world's population and contribute significantly to the workforce, working two-thirds of the total hours yet earning only one-third of the income and owning less than one-tenth of the world's resources. This illustrates the poor economic status of women, particularly in countries like India. In India, with a population of approximately 1.252 billion, women total around 586 million. This means women represent nearly 40% of the population, perform two-thirds of the work, and produce 60% of the food consumed in the country while earning only 30% of the total wages and owning 12% of the property. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution, which promotes equality for women and encourages the state to implement supportive measures for their advancement [2]. India has various laws, policies, and programs aimed at improving women's status in different areas. However, there remains a considerable gap between the goals stated in these development initiatives and the actual situation of women in the country. The fundamental issue lies in gender inequality in India. Gender disparities are evident in various forms, with a particularly striking trend, being the continuous decline in the female population proportion over recent decades. Social stereotyping and violence at both domestic and societal levels serve as significant indicators of this issue. Young girls, adolescents, and women frequently experience discrimination across many regions of the country. In India, for example, the sex ratio is currently recorded at 933, highlighting a pronounced gender imbalance. The underlying causes of gender inequality are intricately linked to social and economic structures, shaped by both informal and formal norms and practices. Consequently, women's access to education, healthcare, and productive resources remains inadequate, which leads to a substantial portion of the female population, being marginalized, impoverished, and socially excluded. A primary challenge to women's empowerment is the low literacy rate among women, which significantly



restricts their ability to engage actively in the economy, thereby leaving a considerable segment of India's population economically vulnerable. Socially, women often face suppression within domestic environments and struggle to attain respectable standing, with their capabilities frequently undervalued in comparison to their male counterparts. Politically, female participation remains limited; even when women do engage as voters or representatives, they are often reduced to being proxies for their male relatives. In the patriarchal context of Indian society, women typically bear the majority of family responsibilities. Such disadvantaged circumstances expose them to domestic violence, sexual abuse both at home and in the workplace, and hinder their prospects for

advancement across various areas of life. Furthermore, globalization has introduced additional complexities to the pursuit of gender equity, with the associated impacts on women not being thoroughly examined. Research conducted by the Department of Women and Child Development indicates a pressing need for policy reform aimed at enhancing women's access to employment opportunities and improving job quality. The benefits of an expanding global economy have not been equitably distributed, resulting in increased economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, exacerbated gender inequality, and the deterioration of working conditions, particularly within informal sectors and rural areas (Fig 1).

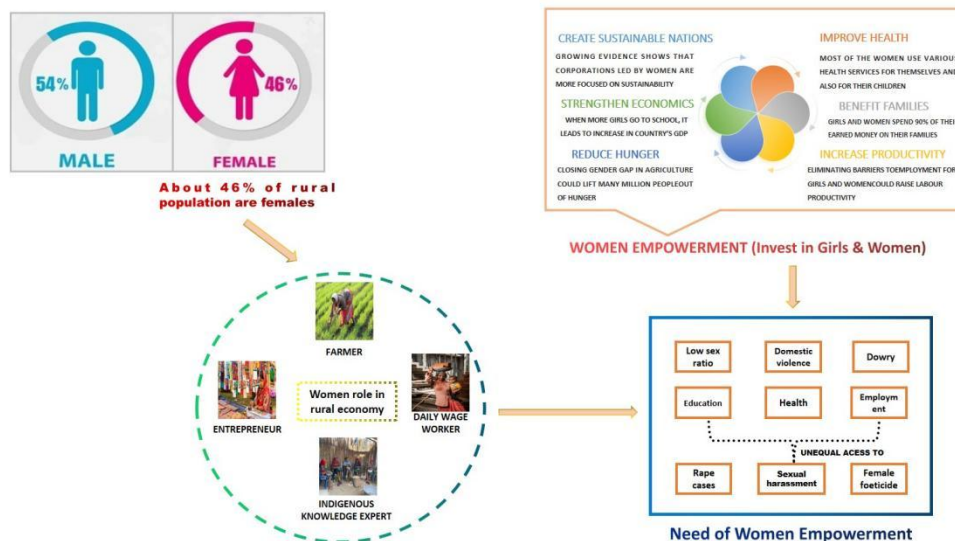


Figure 1. Impact of women empowerment on community development

ORIGIN OF THE TERM EMPOWERMENT

It is noteworthy that the majority of dictionaries primarily present a pre-twentieth century definition of the verb "empower," denoting meanings such as "to give power to" and "to authorize." The term was first utilized in the 17th century and encompasses meanings such as "authorize," "delegate," or "enable." Consequently, the concept of empowerment is intricate, implying a dynamic transfer of power over a prolonged period. Empowerment, as a contemporary idea, reflects societal advancements that would have been inconceivable two centuries ago, when the principles of democracy namely, "government of the people, for the people, and by the people" were matters of significant struggle. The 20th century provided numerous instances of political empowerment, spearheaded by influential figures

such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela. From the viewpoint of individuals belonging to marginalized groups, empowerment pertains to initiatives aimed at increasing their power base. The issue of "women's empowerment" has evolved into a global phenomenon. Since the establishment of the United Nations, the development of women has garnered attention from scholars around the world, positioning this concept on the political agendas of numerous nations. Currently, the term "empowerment" has supplanted the previously dominant term "development." Although "empowerment" achieved significant traction as a buzzword in the 1960s, extensive discourse surrounding it in the literature did not emerge until the 1980s. It required approximately twenty-five years for the United Nations to designate the year



2001 as the "International Year for Women's Empowerment," following the declaration of the "Women's Decade" in 1975. India subsequently recognized 2001 as the "Women's Empowerment Year," reflecting a broader international commitment to advancing women's rights and roles within society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To comprehend the fundamental principles of women's empowerment.
- To elucidate the role of education in enhancing the socio-economic and political status of women.
- To highlight the various forms of women's empowerment achieved through diverse initiatives.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND EMPOWERMENT: THE CONCEPT

Empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the processes and mechanisms through which individuals, particularly those from marginalized or disadvantaged groups, gain authority, control, and the ability to influence their circumstances [3]. The foundation of empowerment is rooted in the idea of providing individuals with the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities to make informed choices and to act upon them. Historically, empowerment has been associated with social movements and efforts to address inequalities across various spheres, including gender, race, and socio-economic status. The discourse surrounding empowerment gained significant traction in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the context of women's rights and social justice. Various institutions, including the United Nations, have played a pivotal role in promoting empowerment as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development. The concept is often viewed through different lenses, such as social, economic, political, or psychological empowerment. Social empowerment involves the enhancement of individuals' social status and networks, while economic empowerment focuses on financial independence and access to resources. Political empowerment pertains to the ability of individuals to participate in decision-making processes, and psychological empowerment emphasizes the development of self-efficacy and confidence. Researchers and practitioners have identified several key dimensions of empowerment, including access to education, participation in governance, economic opportunities, and the promotion of rights and agency. Empowerment initiatives often aim to destruct systemic barriers and foster environments

that encourage active participation from marginalized populations [4]. However, empowerment is a dynamic and evolving concept integral to achieving equity and social justice. It remains a critical area of study in various fields, including sociology, gender studies, and development economics, as societies continue to strive toward inclusivity and equality.

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Education serves as a powerful tool to elevate individuals from ignorance, enabling them to recognize their potential and empowered status. It is widely acknowledged that education is crucial for promoting both personal and national development. When education empowers women across various dimensions, socio-cultural, economic, interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological investing in it becomes essential not just for individuals but for whole society [5,6]. Freire's approach to education emphasizes a dialogical process grounded in understanding the complexities of knowledge and the intention to bring about change. This type of education fosters transformation, liberation, and human growth [7]. By gaining access to education, individuals develop the capacity to critically evaluate their circumstances, challenge political and scientific neutrality, and advocate for humanity-centered values. Freire also emphasizes the connection between popular education and active engagement with oppressed communities, reinforcing the need for education to challenge oppressive structures [8]. A comprehensive education program can play a significant role in reshaping patriarchal attitudes. To challenge and destruct the systems that perpetuate gender inequality, the ideological frameworks supporting patriarchal dominance must be reformed to champion women's rights. Education has been shown to effectively narrow gender wage gaps and can significantly reduce economic disparities in the labor market. Ensuring girls education is not only a fundamental human right but also delivers a multitude of economic and social advantages, aligning with global objectives. In many contexts, men still maintain strong influences over women's lives in decision-making processes. Traditional educational frameworks have predominantly equipped women for roles as wives and mothers, which is significant and may not fully address the complexities of modern life. Therefore, it is essential to promote education not just for men but equally for women, highlighting the importance of



inclusive educational systems that facilitate the holistic development of all individuals [9] (Fig 2).



Figure 2. Role of women empowerment in education

TYPES OF EMPOWERMENT

The preceding discussions indicate that various authors and organizations have sought to define the term 'empowerment' from their distinct perspectives, ranging from personal resilience to the enhancement of women's capacities. Presently, the empowerment of women can be systematically categorized into five key dimensions: social, educational, economic, political, and psychological. This framework illustrates the multifaceted nature of empowerment and its vital significance in promoting gender equality and advancing societal development (Fig 3).

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Social Empowerment refers to the mechanisms that enhance women's social relationships and elevate their status within social frameworks. This concept addresses the social discriminations prevalent in society based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. Empowerment is frequently associated with feminist methodologies. Moreover, empowerment is described as "a multi-dimensional social process that assists individuals in gaining control over their own lives." This process fosters individual agency, enabling people to address issues they consider significant for themselves, their communities, and society at large level. Valsamma Antony provides a closely related definition, asserting that "the empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional process that should enable individuals or groups to realize their full identity and potential across all spheres of life." The empowerment of women entails the enjoyment of equal rights, status, and opportunities for self-development, equivalent to those afforded to men. In her analysis, Antony references Mikhail Gorbachev, the former President of the USSR, who remarked that "the status of women serves as a barometer of the democratism of

any state and an indicator of the respect for human rights within it." From a sociological perspective, Gangrade [10] extends this definition of empowerment, proposing that it encompasses "equal status, opportunities, and the freedom for women to develop themselves." Women continue to face exploitation in numerous societies. Srivastava [11] examines women's empowerment from the viewpoint of their susceptibility to various forms of exploitation, arguing for the necessity of empowering women socially, economically, and politically. This empowerment is essential for enabling women to liberate themselves from male domination and to assert their claim to equality.

Health is an essential cornerstone of achieving the holistic development of individuals. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines positive health status as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" [12]. Shiva [13] compellingly argues that "Women's empowerment encompasses, ensuring that women, regardless of their circumstances, are healthy, possess adequate resources to meet their needs, and secure not only their own survival but also that of their families and communities. This empowerment enables them to live with dignity in a safe and nurturing environment, facilitating their comprehensive development, physically, emotionally, socially, and economically." Legal experts and attorneys analyze women's empowerment through various lenses. The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations emphasizes the obligation of member states to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women" [14]. In this context, Freeman [15] articulates that "The key to women's empowerment is the recognition and enforcement of women's human rights." The legal experts advocate for the discourse of all forms of legal discrimination against women, asserting that without the establishment of women's legal rights and a social order, true empowerment for women will remain unattainable. Furthermore, Seddon *et al.*, [16] defines women's empowerment as "the ability to contribute at all levels of society beyond the confines of the home. Empowerment also entails the recognition and valuation of women's contributions." Additionally, McWhirter, as cited by Aspy and Sandhu [17] in their book *Empowering Women Equity: A Counseling Approach*, delineates the concept of empowerment as "the process by which individuals, organizations, or groups that are marginalized, (a) become cognizant of the power dynamics that



influence their life context, (b) develop the skills and abilities necessary to gain a reasonable degree of control over their lives, (c) exercise this control, (d) without infringing upon the rights of others, and (e) actively support the empowerment of others in their community.”

EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Traditional concepts recognize higher education as a pivotal tool for personal development, facilitating the expansion of an individual's intellectual horizons, overall well being, and potential for empowerment [18]. Higher education is regarded as the foremost catalyst for sociopolitical and economic transformation. However, the landscape of women's educational empowerment in India presents significant challenges. According to the recently released United Nations Development Report 2011, India ranks 134 out of 187 countries [19]. The assertion that when one male child is literate, he achieves personal education, whereas the education of one female child benefits the entire family, has been acknowledged by national political leaders, policymakers, administrators, and bureaucrats. In this context, Rao [20] asserts that it is imperative to provide women with free and compulsory education to enhance their awareness of rights and duties, alongside the provision of potential free legal aid to empower them, to advocate for themselves without incurring financial burdens. The advantages of an educated mother extend significantly beyond those of a mere instructor, education fosters self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency. It illuminates pathways of hope, enhances social, political, intellectual, and cultural consciousness, broadens perspectives, and diminishes forms of bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and superstition while promoting values such as tolerance and fellow-feeling. Devendra [21] underscores the critical importance of health, education, and self-esteem for women, suggesting that the empowerment of women should encompass, equipping them with the tools to achieve economic independence, foster self-reliance, and cultivate positive self-esteem, thereby enabling them to confront challenging situations and participate actively in developmental initiatives.

Additionally, empowered women possess the capacity to participate actively in decision-making processes and to influence the formulation and implementation of various policies and programs. The role of education is paramount in this context. Pathak [22] aligns with this viewpoint, emphasizing the necessity of empowering women across social, educational, political, economic, and

cultural dimensions. He asserts that an increase in the literacy rate among women, enables them to comprehend the rights afforded to them by the Indian Constitution, as well as the provisions enshrined in the Panchayati Raj. In the contemporary environment, Information Technology and media, encompassing both electronic and print formats, serve critical functions in disseminating knowledge and enhancing accessibility to information. It has become increasingly evident that no society can achieve genuine empowerment without the integration and effective utilization of information technology. The fundamental aspect of empowerment is encapsulated in its association with the concept of 'power.' Zorrilla and Santiago [23] characterize empowerment as a process through which women create personal space and time, facilitating critical and collective re-examination of their lives. They further contend that women's empowerment signifies a heightened awareness of external realities, as well as an understanding of internal belief systems that influence gender justice and social equity. Professor Mukhopadhyaya [24] offers a broader interpretation of empowerment, defining it as the attainment of freedom from deprivation and ensuring equal access to knowledge and information. Empowerment involves the formation of organized groups and the establishment of information systems that foster communal knowledge. The interrelation between poverty and illiteracy is significant, as individuals lacking education often experience a profound sense of powerlessness, perceiving that external forces control their lives. This perception can lead to a reliance on chance or supernatural elements for change. In this framework, Jhabvala [25] posits that empowerment serves as a mechanism through which disempowered individuals can transform their circumstances, thereby regaining control over their lives. This process enables them to redefine existing power dynamics and enhance their living conditions, ultimately addressing longstanding inequalities. Moreover, through education and knowledge acquisition, women can overcome these challenges, thereby fostering an ongoing cycle of empowerment and societal transformation.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Economic empowerment is an imperative issue in contemporary society. As articulated by Elliott [26], "Wage employment signifies economic power". Moreover, through securing employment, women are able to generate income, thus assuming the role of 'breadwinners' and contributing members



of their households, while simultaneously fostering a robust sense of economic independence. Biswas [27] underscores that "economic empowerment constitutes a formidable tool against poverty". The Djakarta Declaration [28] emphasizes that "the empowerment of women is not merely a matter of equal consideration rather, it is a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development." In the absence of economic self-sufficiency, the significance of other rights and opportunities is diminished. Economic empowerment can be defined as the pathway through which impoverished, landless, and marginalized populations can liberate themselves from deprivation and oppression, thus gaining the ability to reap benefits from both markets and households. It enables individuals to secure adequate nutrition and fulfill fundamental requirements such as housing, clothing, healthcare, and clean water. The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) advocates for the economic empowerment of women, asserting that the ability to raise one's voice and gain visibility is contingent upon access to economic resources. Hameed *et al.*, [29] articulates that women's empowerment can be characterized as a process whereas women gain increased control over material, human, and intellectual resources, as well as decision-making authority within their homes, communities, and at larger societal levels. Economic empowerment is essential for achieving equitable work opportunities, benefits, treatment, and a supportive work environment. SEWA promotes the notion that full employment and self-reliance among disadvantaged and rural women should be prioritized, embodying the belief that when women possess independent income and ownership of assets, they experience greater security, empowerment, and autonomy. Additionally, Singh [30] asserts that "Micro Finance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy." He further defines empowerment as a transformative process through which individuals or groups gain the power and capability to take control over their lives. In the realm of economic development, this empowerment approach places emphasis on mobilizing the self-help initiatives of the impoverished, rather than solely relying on social welfare provisions, thereby fostering the empowerment of previously disadvantaged segments of the population.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The inclusion of women in the political arena and various decision-making bodies constitutes a critical mechanism for empowerment.

It is imperative to engage women at all levels of governance to foster genuine empowerment. As noted by Brill [31], "Without our own voices being heard inside the government areas and halls of public policy and debate, we are without the right to accountability, a basic establishment of those who are governed." Furthermore, empowerment should not be perceived as conferring power, since individuals inherently possess significant capabilities stemming from their knowledge and motivation, enabling them to perform effectively in their roles. Empowerment involves facilitating the release of this inherent power. This endeavor not only encourages individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to surmount challenges in their personal and professional lives but also supports their overall development within society. Women worldwide have long contended with various forms of oppression, subjugation, and mistreatment, both within familial contexts and beyond. To ensure women's survival and advancement, it is essential to integrate them into influential positions where they can formulate and implement policies and programs effectively. Alizai *et al.*, [32] further articulates this viewpoint, asserting, "Empowerment of women in all spheres, particularly the political sphere, is crucial for their advancement and the foundation of a gender-equal society. It is central to the achievement of the goals of equality, development, and peace." Without active participation in political processes, women will face significant challenges in enhancing their effectiveness and capacity while simultaneously confronting entrenched power structures and patriarchal ideologies.

Politics plays a critical role in determining the distribution of resources and opportunities within society. Thus, the political empowerment of women is an urgent priority. This concept entails the decentralization of power from existing structures that marginalize underprivileged, oppressed, and voiceless groups, thereby allowing them to engage in decision-making processes related to government policies and societal issues. Tiwari [33] explores women's empowerment in the context of Indian society, emphasizing a feminist liberation approach that remains relevant in contemporary discourse. He suggests various measures designed to eliminate restrictions and limitations imposed by patriarchal systems, which reflect male dominance. In contrast, Sharma [34] aptly notes that empowerment encompasses a wide range of activities, extending from individual self-assertion to collective resistance and mobilization aimed at challenging established power relations. Moreover, women's



empowerment is closely linked to their overall welfare and development. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen posits that development correlates with freedom, suggesting that the empowerment of women is realized when they actively participate in the developmental process. It is essential for disempowered individuals to assert themselves and contribute meaningfully to societal progress.

The advancement of women in society is significantly hindered by their inadequate participation in development activities, a situation predominantly caused by obstacles imposed by a patriarchal system. It is imperative to recognize that genuine empowerment cannot be conferred upon individuals by others; rather, it is achieved through personal initiative and effort. As articulated by Sardenberg [35], "empowerment is a process" that cannot simply be bestowed. This process encompasses both individual and collective dimensions, with group participation often serving to enhance awareness and the capacity to initiate transformative actions. Van *et al.*, [36] further elaborates that "empowerment is a process geared towards participation, greater decision-making, and transformative action through awareness and capacity building." This multifaceted approach necessitates the consolidation of resources to cultivate power and strength. The empowerment of women is closely linked to their active engagement in social and political activities, thereby highlighting the necessity of understanding the nature of political participation. Scholars have defined political participation in various ways, yet there exists a common thread connecting these definitions to the concept of power, particularly within democratic societies. Political engagement instills a sense of empowerment among participants, facilitating upward mobility and providing opportunities for marginalized individuals to influence public decision-making in favor of their rights and interests. While traditional notions of politics are often confined to governmental structures, contemporary expressions of political engagement now encompass movements, protests, and demonstrations. It is crucial to emphasize that the empowerment of women should not result in the subjugation of men or the oppression of other women. The ultimate goal is to attain an equitable distribution of power and authority between genders, fostering an environment characterized by freedom from domination and suppression.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Psychological empowerment enables women to transcend traditional patriarchal norms

and social obligations, facilitating a transformation of their identities and subjectivities. Participation in educational institutions, political parties, or decision-making bodies, as well as engagement in professional occupations, allows women to acquire self-confidence, recognize their self-worth, and assert control over their own income and bodies. Such involvement provides opportunities for women to gain insights into the world beyond their immediate environments, in contrast to those who remain confined at home. This journey of personal growth and exploration bestows self-respect, pride, maturity, and resilience, further reinforcing their independence. Participating in diverse roles equips women with mental fortitude, fostering resilience, adaptability, and a strong work ethic. They acquire essential skills in navigating life's challenges and adjusting to evolving circumstances. Ultimately, psychological empowerment contributes to enhanced satisfaction in various aspects of life, including work, personal relationships, learning, and financial management.

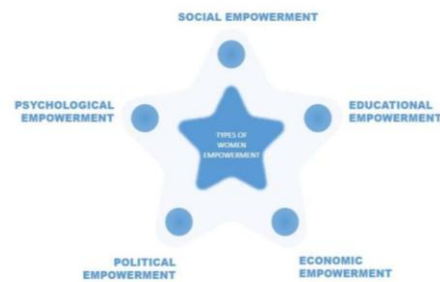


Figure 3. Types of women empowerment

SELF HELP GROUPS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are intentional organizations comprising 20 to 30 individuals, predominantly women, who come together to address their common issues through mutual assistance and self-improvement. These groups have emerged as a significant initiative for alleviating poverty and facilitating the empowerment of women. Self-Help Groups are recognized as an effective strategy for women's empowerment, with various programs established by the Government of India demonstrating that robust women's groups can play a crucial role in development and the provision of essential services [37]. It is vital to ensure that women are included in the formulation of policies related to rural and economic development, making the equitable distribution of opportunities for women particularly necessary. Through an



examination of the functioning and impact of SHGs across different nations, it can be confidently asserted that the SHG model has yielded substantial success in addressing poverty and promoting women's empowerment. For example, the rural communities of Bangladesh exemplify the positive outcomes associated with SHGs [38]. Nevertheless, in the context of a developing country like India, several challenges writ careful investigation and critical analysis before drawing definitive conclusions regarding the efficacy of SHGs as instruments for women's empowerment.

METHODS OF EMPOWERMENT

In the early 21st century, the term 'empowerment' has gained substantial prominence on both national and international scales. This concept is intricately associated with power and status. There exist various methods through which empowerment can be achieved, including the acquisition of diverse assets, economic, physical, social, and intellectual. A critical avenue for empowerment is education, which encompasses conventional, technical, vocational, legal, scientific, and specialized domains such as astrology and astronomy. Moreover, women can attain empowerment by securing stable employment, fostering entrepreneurial skills, enhancing personal development, and increasing visibility through mass media. Furthermore, holding leadership positions within national, state, or local institutions contributes significantly to this objective. The empowerment of women is further facilitated by land ownership and the application of advanced technologies to maximize production efficiency and profitability. Engaging in economic activities and embracing the role of primary earners, alongside promoting mental fortitude, resilience, and self-esteem among women, is essential. However, one of the most effective pathways to empowerment is through active participation in the political process. Widespread citizen engagement is critical for the optimal functioning of governmental structures at all levels, including national, state, and local authorities. Political participation has created significant opportunities for altering social status and enhancing the upward mobility of women in both rural and urban contexts. Nabatchi and Leighninger [39] asserts that "Public participation is essential to the success of a democracy." Additionally, Sidney [40] have identified various modes of political participation, indicating that individuals can influence governmental decisions through actions such as writing letters to representatives, voting, or joining community action groups, while also

dismissing non-systematic activities, including protests, riots, and civil unrest. The concepts of 'ceremonial' or 'support' participation are frequently overlooked in the discussion of political engagement. These forms of participation refer to citizen involvement in expressing support for government initiatives, participating in parades, and contributing actively to developmental programs and projects. Additionally, this can include involvement in youth groups organized by governmental agencies or the exercise of voting rights in ceremonial elections. Sidney and colleagues [40] delineate four distinct types of political participation: (a) voting, (b) campaign activity, (c) communal activity, and (d) particularized contacts. Voting is regarded as the most significant mechanism through which citizens can exert control over the government and its representatives. Campaign activity serves as a critical method for influencing political leaders during the electoral process and requires a greater level of engagement than simply casting a vote. Communal activities take on a dual form: they can be undertaken individually or collectively. Individual citizens may choose to contact government officials, while collective efforts are aimed at addressing broader social issues that affect the community. Conversely, particularized contacts involve interactions between family members and government officials regarding specific concerns impacting their household, which requires a considerable degree of initiative and proactivity from the involved citizens.

CONDITION FOR EMPOWERMENT

Various factors impact the process of women's empowerment through political participation. As noted by Fiske [41], considerations include "the psychological make-up of the individual, their overall personality, and the external environment, comprising social, economic, and cultural influences, as well as individual responses to such stimuli." Furthermore, several conditions adversely affect women's political engagement. These conditions encompass long-standing beliefs, customs, superstitions, time limitations, patriarchal responsibilities, lack of confidence, inadequate education, limited awareness, precarious financial circumstances within the family, and a hostile societal environment. Such obstacles pose significant challenges to women's empowerment. Additionally, it appears that political parties exhibit a lack of interest in promoting women's involvement in key political decision-making processes. Consequently, addressing these barriers is crucial to



fostering a more inclusive political landscape that enables women to actively participate and exert influence within the realm of political decision-making.

WHY ESPECIALLY WOMEN EMPOWERMENT BECAME NECESSARY?

The empowerment of women is not only essential; it has become a critical imperative in contemporary society. Over the past three decades, numerous women's organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and progressive governments have actively advocated for women's empowerment. Despite these concerted efforts, the status of women remains alarmingly poor, marked by oppression and discriminatory practices throughout India, irrespective of the prevailing political party or the gender of political leaders in power. To comprehend the precarious position of women in various social, economic, and political contexts, it is pertinent to consider several illustrative examples of discrimination and violence against women globally, including in India. Only five percent of United Nations member states have ratified the International Labor Organization conventions (1981 & 1982), which protect women with family responsibilities from unjust termination of employment. In the United States, approximately 77 percent of individuals living in poverty are single, divorced, or widowed women. Although Communist ideology constitutionally endorses gender equality, the reality in the former Soviet Union reveals a significant disparity, where nearly 88 percent of women were engaged in manual labor, such as ditch digging, while women constituted less than one percent of members of the Soviet Academy of Science. The discrimination faced by women in Indonesia is particularly notable, as a 15-year-old boy is recognized as the legal head of the family in the absence of a father, even if the mother is a qualified professional, such as a lawyer or a high school teacher [42]. Despite women representing 50 percent of the global population, they occupy less than 12 percent of seats in national legislatures. Of the 177 countries surveyed, only 14 have achieved female representation exceeding thirty percent in their national parliaments. This underscores a persistent struggle for women to attain equal political power across various regions, including European and American countries. The Napoleonic Civil Code exemplifies this inequality, asserting that "those persons without rights at law are minors, married women, criminals, and the mentally deficient" (Eschel, 1989, p. 17). In the context of India, the socio-economic and political status of

women remains distressing. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate for women in India is only 65.46 percent, in comparison to 82.14 percent for men, revealing a gender gap of 16.68 percent. Approximately 35 percent of women in India are illiterate, and the situation is even more dire in rural areas, where the literacy rate for women is reported at just 58.75 percent, contrasted with 78.57 percent for men. Additionally, the sex ratio further highlights the underlying societal issues that necessitate urgent and comprehensive interventions aimed at promoting gender equality.

Further, the 2011 Census reveals a troubling trend regarding the sex ratio in India, which has decreased from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011. This decline indicates a pronounced societal preference for male children over female children. The alarming rise in female feticide further contributes to this disparity, particularly in states with higher literacy levels [43]. In the realm of education, significant gender disparities persist. The Sixth All India Educational Survey, conducted by NCERT in 1995 indicates that women constituted only 23% of primary teachers in rural areas, in contrast to 60% in urban environments. At the upper primary level, the figures remain disproportionately low, with women representing 25% in rural sectors and 59% in urban sectors. Furthermore, discrimination in the recruitment of women as primary teachers continues to be a significant issue. The scarcity of vocational training institutions for women is stark, as only 154 out of 2,240 Industrial Training Institutions (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centers (ITCs) are dedicated to women, underscoring a critical gap in vocational education opportunities [43]. Turning to political representation, despite the fact that the 15th Lok Sabha has seen the highest number of women Members of Parliament, they still only constitute 11% of the total. Economic disparities are equally concerning in 2007, the estimated earned income for women was merely \$1,304, whereas for men it was \$4,102. For comparison, in the United States, men earned \$34,996 and women earned \$5,536 [44]. Maternal health presents another critical challenge, with the Maternal Mortality Rate in India reported at 212 per 1,000 live births in 2009. Additionally, child marriage remains a significant issue, with 36.8% of girls marrying before reaching the age of 18, while the median age for first marriage is 17.2 years, despite the legal marriage age being set at 18. Consequently, approximately 16% of girls aged 15-19 have commenced childbearing. Anemia, particularly among adolescent girls, poses a substantial public health challenge. Notably, 36% of



women aged 15-49 exhibit a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18.5 kg/m², indicating chronic nutritional deficiency, with this figure rising to 47% for girls aged 15-19 [45]. Iron deficiency is widely recognized as the most prevalent nutritional deficiency disorder in India, affecting nearly 58% of pregnant women, 50% of women of reproductive age, 56% of adolescent girls, 30% of adolescent boys, and 70% of children under the age of five.

II. CONCLUSION

Empowering women is regarded as a critical issue in advancing sustainable development in numerous countries around the globe. Governments and various organizations are dedicated to enhance women's empowerment through the implementation of diverse interventions, which encompass providing access to microfinance services, promoting sustainable development, and advocating for human rights [46]. For meaningful development to transpire and for gender equity to be realized, it is essential for both men and women to reach their full potential as individuals. Education plays a pivotal role in this process, as it must actively contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes. The success of any development initiative relies on the cooperative engagement and active participation of both genders. Women's empowerment is a belief-mediated process where the influence of objective social conditions such as the strength of the knowledge economy is shaped by individuals' propensity to foster emancipative beliefs. The advancement of the economy necessitates collaboration between men and women, allowing women to effectively apply their skills. The empowerment of women benefits not only individual women and women's groups but also families and the community at large scale through collaborative development efforts [47]. Therefore, the education of women constitutes a significant tool for their empowerment.

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