



## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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### **Concept of Empowerment:**

Empowerment is a multifaceted approach, which enables the individuals to realize, to increase their capabilities. It provides them access to knowledge and resources. Empowerment improves the ability of the individuals to act upon their problems. Empowerment is an active process and it gives the ability and opportunity to the people to take part in decision-making process with regard to their socio-economic and political issues. Empowerment goes beyond socio-economic or political issue' and it mostly refers to the process of "psychological empowerment". Empowerment links to issues of social justice and equity Women in development (WID) concept, regards women's advancement in the context of development. The WID concept recognised woman's productive role. Emphasis was, on measures promoting women's equality to men and their economic independence was path towards equity. The concept of this approach is that women, outside development process, would be waste of human resources and detrimental to national development. Subsequently, the rational for WID was, women's greater contribution means efficient use of resources to improve the development process. The focus was on giving support to women, in skills training and improved technology.

However, this approach focused on advocacy of equal participation of women in education, employment and other spheres of society. It assumed that gender relations would change by

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themselves when women become full economic partners in development. The WID approach did not consider the context in which the problems originate and develop but merely emphasised on women's level of participation and benefit.

### **Equality Approach:**

The equality approach is evident from mid 1970s. It aimed highlighting women's significant economic contributions and to gain equality in all spheres of life. This is identical to western feminism. Many governments in the world accept the principles of women's equality of opportunities, legal equality in property and family law, access to credit. In India, cultural constraints were the major obstacle of women development.

Efforts of equal treatment of women in all spheres of life result in increasing their productivity and income. In programmes, this meant transfer of technology to women on belief that appropriate technology will reduce their workload in income generating activities. The provision of extension services and credit would ensure development. This was first major step forward than the earlier approaches, where women were only homemakers and mothers, for whom the welfare measures thought to be sufficient.

### **Gender and Development:**

In 1980s, the term gender became popular in development debate. The concept of gender refers to women and men, their socially defined characteristics, moulded by historical, economic, religious, ethnic and cultural factors through the process of socialisation. As a result, women and

men have different experiences in life, different knowledge, different perspectives and priorities.

Gender differences characterised by inequality in education, nutrition, decision- making and earnings. The introduction of the concept of gender in development emphasises the need for



social change by bringing down the subordination of women in the society and making them equal to men, in power and relations. Gender and development stresses the need to empower women in society. Thus, gender and development, instead of women in development is more than just a change of name. It relates to the inclusion of women in development initiatives to reduce the inequalities between women and men. The term 'people' includes both women and men, the 'poor' are poor women and poor men, 'refugees' are refugee women and refugee men and 'children' are both girls and boys. Development strategies must consistently be conscious of the differing perspectives and experiences of women and men, from time to time (Birgit Kerstan 1992).

### **Empowerment Approach:**

The empowerment approach arises from a strong commitment to women's rights and capacities to make their own decisions in development strategies. It recognises that top down legislative changes or marginal economic improvements will not change women's status but, popular education and consciousness in women and men through economic and political mobilisation must match the strategies. The focus is mainly on grass root projects, support for women's collective action through self-help groups. These projects are concerned with democratisation and political action. Women empowerment is a holistic approach covering social, political, and economic aspects. Women are integral part of every economy. To ensure all round development and growth of a nation, they must consider women as equal partners in progress with men. However, in most developing countries, women have low social and economic status, compared to men. In such situations, effective empowerment of women is essential to harness women labour into mainstream of economic development.



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