



## A study of sources and mechanisms leading to empowerment of women living in certain slum areas of New Delhi, India

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### General Note

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The definitions and approaches for measuring and assessing women's empowerment manifest complex paradigm shifts over the years. Since 1950 until the "Decade of Women" (1975-1985), the welfare approach predominated. After this, women's development has been conceptualized by equity, empowerment and rights-based approaches. There has been varying emphasis on concerns like the condition/situation of women and their practical/strategic needs. The *Welfare approach* had intrinsic defects e.g. (a) women were considered net recipients (or consumers) and not participants in (or owners) of the agencies and programmes created for their own development, (b) its very narrow definitions of 'women's issues' i.e., health, education and violence against women and (c) for assigning to women domestic roles only of wives/mothers/homemakers.

The 'Decade of Women' was characterized by the perception that the practical gender needs or interests of women need to be distinguished from their strategic gender needs or interests (Molyneux, 1985), e.g. finding food or fuel for the family. Addressing such practical gender needs, could lead to an improvement in the condition of women. The *equity approach* valued equality. It recognized that women sought equality in their three primary roles in society a) reproductive b) productive and c) as community workers. State intervention was required to ensure that the strategic needs of women were met in all these roles. The stress on 'strategic needs' caused a backlash in the name of traditions/customs. The focus in government-sponsored programs on 'equity' was temporarily replaced by 'anti-poverty' and 'efficiency' approaches. The former approach concerned with the role of women as economic producers, and the latter tried to meet the practical needs of women through their own interventions in their three primary roles.

Empowerment has been defined as a *change* in the context of a woman's life that enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. Its external attributes are health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and material security. It also includes internal qualities such as self-awareness and self-confidence (Human Development in South Asia, 2000). The equity and empowerment approaches in tandem recalled the gender and development (GAD) concept. Women activists have tried to turn to a *rights-based approach*, due to the fact that (a) GAD had little focus on men and majority of women were ground down by poverty and patriarchy both; (b) it encompassed concepts of welfare, anti-poverty, equity and empowerment, (c) for people-centered development to be sustainable, and for the enjoyment of human rights, an enabling environment is necessary. Critics of

the rights-based approach argue that the approach ignores efficiency criteria, since it does not deal with responsibilities (Human Development in South Asia, 2000).

The Government of India has formulated various policies to enhance women's visibility in the economic, political and social spheres. Thus, the Sixth Five Year Plan Document (1982–87) laid special emphasis on education, access to health and family planning, employment and economic independence for women's development. In the Eighth Five Year Plan Document (1992–97), this approach shifted from being equal partners in the development process, to that of empowerment of women. Employment, education and health were given due importance. In the year 2000, the Government of India reviewed its commitments made at the Beijing Conference in 1995. A committee for monitoring gender mainstreaming was proposed — to be set up in the Department of Women and Child Development. This was given the mandate of monitoring the implementation of more than 47 beneficiary-oriented schemes. A 'dual strategy' was adopted for mainstreaming the gender issues related to all development activities and programmes exclusively meant for women. The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997–2002) formulated and committed schemes exclusively meant for women. This led to finalization and adoption of a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women allocating at least 30% of funds flow to women from other developmental sectors (Government of India (GOI) Annual Report 2001–02).

A review by the Planning Commission indicated that only 43% of gross budgetary support in 15 ministries/departments was spent on women. In sectors such as family welfare, health, education, women and child, and Indian systems of medicine nearly 50% to 80% of the plan expenditure was directed to women (Economic Survey 2002–03). Against this backdrop of schemes, there has been a steep decline in the share of development in total revenue expenditure — from 72% in 1980–81 to 63% in 1995–96, taking the consolidated budgetary position of all the states together (Gopalan, 2002). The National Commission for Women set up in 1992 covers issues relating to safeguarding women's rights and promotion of their empowerment. It works for review of laws, intervention in specific individual complaints of atrocities and sexual harassment of women at work place, and remedial actions to safeguard the interest of women (United Nations, 2000).

GOI announced a National Policy for Empowerment of Women – 2001, to bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women belonging to weaker groups, including Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes with emphasis on poverty reduction schemes. In most states the new strategy for economic development of women through facilitating access to training, entrepreneurship development, credit, technical consultancy services and marketing facilities have been formulated and efforts made to implement them. Parallel changes have occurred at the national level. More than one third of the population of India lives under conditions of abject poverty (UNDP Human Development Report). Of this, about 250 million people do not have adequate food to satisfy their minimum nutritional requirement. Women, as compared to men, are more affected by poverty, with the attendant problems like low wages, lack of job security, long working hours and drudgery. They have been kept away from the mainstream of economic contributions, social status, economic and political activities with little or no say in planning their development at any level (UNFPA).

## 2. EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment implies more power to women within homes, communities and societies. It also means changing policies and legislation to ensure that women can exercise their rights, have full access to educational and economic opportunities and healthcare in order to benefit from economic development and lift themselves and their families out of the poverty trap. It seems that women's empowerment could be taken to mean a process of increase of knowledge, awareness, improvement of skills and participation of women with the objectives of facilitating their roles in the decision making process. This has been the pivot of the present study.

## 3. SLUM

Slum is a structure and a group of structures or an area, which becomes unfit for human habitation due to deficiencies in the nature of living accommodation and deficiencies in the environment.

## 4. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the existential situation of slums.
2. To investigate the situation ethos of slum families with a view to articulating the status and position of women.
3. To evaluate welfare and development programmes launched by various agencies, which directly or indirectly concern women.
4. To summarise the ground realities about the extent to which women have benefited from these welfare and development programmes.
5. Suggest corrective and innovative measures, which can be used to accelerate the process of women's empowerment.

## 5. STUDY AREA AND METHOD

Delhi has a large number of slums known as J.J. Colonies. Out of these, five slums were selected for the study in a manner that makes them representative of the entire universe. Out of these five slums, four exist on sides of metropolis and one in the center. A list of all government and non governmental agencies/institutions agency along with the programmes they operate in these slum areas was prepared in order to draw a sample of hundred families from each of the five slum areas. The size of sample in each area was proportionate to the size of the slum population itself. An attempt was made to link various services provided by different agencies to highlight how each service helps in the empowerment process. Most of the households studied have a girl child, a married adult woman and an old woman. The number of beneficiary respondents added to 350.

## 6. THE MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The women in general and the girl students in particular are not properly and fully aware of the schemes and the provisions therein.
2. Despite all problems most beneficiaries/respondents opined that the schemes are very useful and they could not have pursued education without the scholarship.
3. The study evaluated the strengths, weaknesses and impact of the empowerment programmes of various agencies. This will facilitate in getting a clearer perception about the emergent problems and issues. New guidelines for action, including specific measures at the practical level, can be formulated to attain the desired goals.
4. In general social work professionals should work for effective participation of women in every sphere especially in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This means equal access to education, social, political, health and other services. This will lead to greater participation and in turn improve the social and political status of women.
5. Horizontal and vertical networking and creation of pressure groups seems to be a necessity to ensure genuine representation of women.
6. Empowerment neither has a beginning nor is an end in itself. It is an on going process. Strong social and political structures have to be built devoid of gender biases to enhance women's empowerment. The approach should be bottom up rather than top-down. Efforts should begin at the micro level and women should not only be participants in planning but should also be decision makers.

7. There should be a shift in the power relations existing in the society. Women's empowerment cannot be achieved without sensitizing men on gender issues.
8. This study also provides strong support for the argument that direct and indirect sources of women's empowerment play a role in determining patterns of attitude towards girls' education and future fertility preferences in slums in Delhi. Even after controlling the socio-economic, demographic and structural sources, these influences are not uniform. The relative influences of individual autonomy sources vary over the different socio-economic settings and further research is needed to probe these differences.
9. There are socio-cultural variations in the level of empowerment. The type of family in which a women lives, has a strong association with the mechanisms of empowerment.
10. The state and society must accept responsibility for providing basic services like child care, health services and education inputs. These are not met adequately by women in slums. A challenge for human development is to find the incentives and rewards for efforts towards gender equality.

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