

# Innovations

## Catechizing Women Empowerment through a Multi-Dimensional Prism: Insights from Gender Statistics

**Dr shruti R Panday**

Head and Assistant Professor , Economics Department, SIES College of Arts, Science& Commerce  
(Autonomous), Mumbai University, India

Corresponding Author: **Dr shruti R Panday**

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### **Abstract**

*Women Empowerment is believed to be the key factor in improving status of women in the society. UNO Agenda 30 incorporates gender equality as one of the targets to be achieved not only to ameliorate the condition of women but also the family and the society. In this context, it becomes imperative that the lens through which the concept of women empowerment is seen, should be widened. A host of economic, social, political, cultural factors are interlinked to ensure real endorsement of empowerment to women in the society. The paper tries to elucidate a multivariate multidimensional causative relation among factors which guarantee real empowerment to women at various levels of their life cycles. From available literatures, variables affecting empowerment at various stages were identified and clubbed as facilitating or debilitating factors and at the same time disparity between actual and real magnitude of empowerment has been identified. The paper has been written with women issues in the developing countries with special focus to India.*

**Keywords:** 1. Women empowerment, 2. Multi-dimensional, 3. Facilitating Factors, 4. Debilitating factors, 5. Social norms, 6. Gender divide, 7. Capability.

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### **1. Introduction**

Women constitute nearly one half of the total population (48.036 %), United Nations Population Division's World Population Prospects:2020 of the country; therefore, any talk of nation's progress and development is meaningless if women are denied equal economic and political rights. Several examples can be given across the country which shows that the women are being subjected to suppression, exploitation and being marginalized at various levels. The economic oppression of women in general leads to social and cultural oppression because these factors go hand in hand and become deep rooted in the society. Historical instances support the fact that ownership of economic resources defines the power equilibrium in the society. Nevertheless, economic empowerment is essential to have a dignified life but real recognition of women as an equal partner in decision making needs attitudinal change of the society. Countries around the world has adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Yet, in many countries, women (especially poor women) have less saying than men when it comes to decisions and resources in their households. Over the years, the economic and political participation of women across the countries, especially among least developed countries have increased, but still, they face challenges in asserting themselves. Despite economic gains and politico legal rights, empowerment of women would

remain half achieved if social and cultural attitudes towards them do not change. There are many associative factors which may debilitate the empowerment notion in terms of "Capability" and may give rise to disparity between measured and real empowerment.

## **2. Objective and Methodology**

The main objective of the paper is to explore the various facilitative and debilitating factors both economic and non-economic which determine real empowerment to women. It is also to highlight the difference between rights and rules accessible to women and the actual and real choice to benefit from those. The paper has used various parameters included in Gender Statistics Data of World Bank for the year 2020 to consider the variables which either are facilitating or debilitating the real attainment of women empowerment in India. The study is focused on the case of India so supporting data has also been extracted from the fifth round of the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS), came into public purview on November 24, 2021. Gender composition data was taken from Census 2011. A chart is prepared to club the various parameters under facilitative and debilitating factors. Factors were also put into the chart to conceptualize the difference between guaranteed provisions and actual and real empowerment permeating to women.

## **3. A multi variate multi-dimensional analysis of Empowerment – Literature Review**

Women Empowerment is to be defined in terms of capability approach, (A Sen, 1992), it may be interpreted as the ability to make choices. It may also be analyzed as a change in status and life of women, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. education and awareness, health, status in the family, participation in decision making, mobility and also at the level of financial security) and internal qualities (viz. self-awareness and self-confidence) (Mathew, 2003). The wide array of literature focusing on women empowerment gives us an exposure of various factors and their inter-linkage in achievement of women empowerment to the fullest of its definition. Mahanta (2002) in the study of Northeast, examines women's access to or deprivation of basic human rights as the right to health, education and work, legal rights, rights of working women's, along with domestic violence.

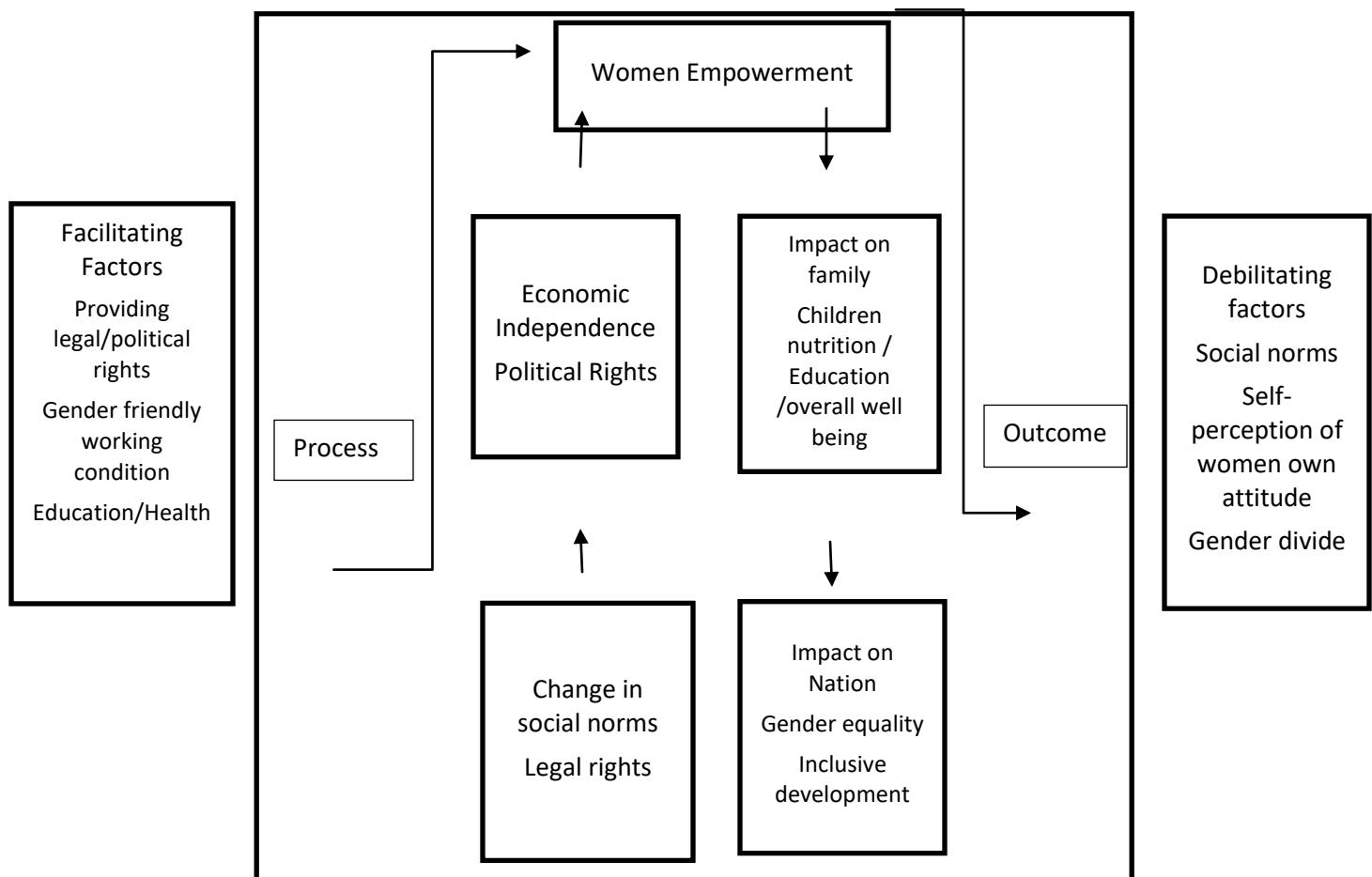
Economic empowerment is not only ( Shridевi, 2005, Raine & Stewart, 2005, Blumberg ,2005), a key for achieving better wellbeing of family, larger nutritional level of children, increased spending on human development resources , but also enhances their capacity of decision making .Other associative factors like political participation and emancipation ( Karat, 2005), Property rights and freedom from domestic violence ( Panda & Agarwal, 2005) , legal rights , education level ( Desai & Thakkar 2007), hierarchy of power ( Deepa Narayan, 2007), level of female political representation ( Figueras, 2008), cultural specific conditions ( Shariff, 2009), are equally important. There is a complex reciprocal relationship between Women's self-understanding (Kabeer, 1999) and Capacity to self-Express (Sen, 1997), which determines their access to material resources and control over them. Though the reproductive role of women is held in high stream, there is a confused understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making and control over her own life. (Barkat, 2008). Women need to be empowered simultaneously along several different dimensions for self being and nation wellbeing. Women empowerment is not a uni -directional linear trajectory process but it is a process involving multidimensional multivariate causative factors. The Women Empowerment Matrix (Wieringa, 1994) maps out the empowerment process as a catalyst for social change, family power relation, institutional variables, role of government, media, educational institutions, NGOs, religious institutions and business

institutions. Gender Social Norms Index (UNDP) measures how social beliefs obstruct gender equality in areas like politics, work and education.

### 3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptualization of Debilitating and Facilitating factors in the context of women empowerment has been framed based on Prof. Harvey Lieberstein's theory of Critical minimum effort, (1960) where he talks of shock (income depressing factors) and stimulants (income generating factors). As mentioned in the theory, shocks are those forces which reduce the level of output, income, employment and investment and reverse the development wheel. On the other hand, stimulants refer to those forces which raise the level of income, output, employment and investment etc. and pushes the economy to higher growth path. On the similar ground, facilitating factors are perceived based on available literature on women empowerment, those which help in realization of women empowerment and debilitating factors are defined as those which hinders the actual realization of women empowerment.

**Chart 1- Facilitating and Debilitating Factors**

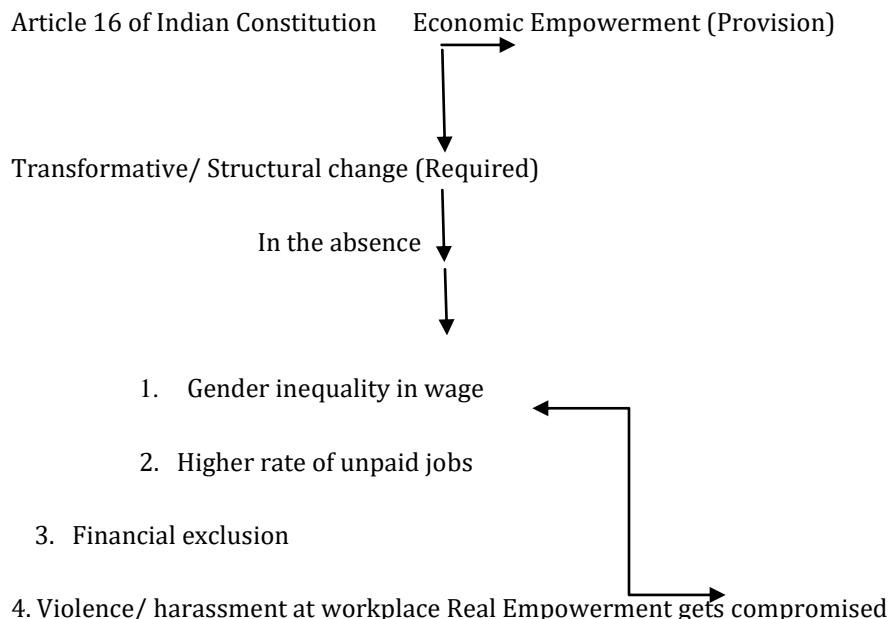


Source- Compiled by the author based on various literatures.

Further these variables have been explored (annexure- 1) by looking at the indicators used in Gender statistics Report of the UNDP 2020. It can be concluded that a high value of the indicators means facilitating factors towards achievement of greater degree of women empowerment, while a low value emphasizes the need to bridge the gender gap on different fronts and address the debilitating factors.

The conceptualization of real empowerment and actual realization of empowerment is based on the notion of "functioning of capability" and the notion of source of disparity between (measured) real income and actual advantage. (Amartya Sen (1985)). In this regard, freedom of choice and control of one's own life has become a central aspect of women empowerment in true sense. To suffice this, one may possess income but cannot get desirable commodities, thus depriving him from exercising his freedom of choice. Likewise, reservation to women in parliament may give them a legal right but social norms and attitudes limiting their scope may deprive them from exercising those legal rights to the fullest. This can be explained through a chart by combining political and legal provision guaranteeing economic and political empowerment but social norms debilitating actual realization of empowerment.

### **Chart 2 -Disparity between Provisioned and Real Empowerment to women**



### **4 Discussion**

At the policy front, it is widely assumed that educating girls and women would improve family health and welfare, rather than looking at education as a source of preparing women for a more equal place in the economy and in society. Economic access and mobility to work and political rights may facilitate women participation in the workforce but may not change the attitudinal gaps fostering the exploitative characters under which women have to survive. Indian Constitution has guaranteed economic empowerment (Equality of opportunity for all citizen in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16), Political empowerment (73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts .1992,) Social Empowerment (No discrimination against any citizen on grounds of sex beside religion, race, caste etc. (Article- 15), There is no

dearth of government plans and programs to safeguard economic and legal rights of women, but despite gender inequities prevails.

Data from available sources (UN- Women report, 2020, NSS report, Census 2011) provides a thoughtful insight about the status of women at various levels of economic, social, political variables crucial for achieving real empowerment. (refer, annexure2) empowerment. Gender pay gap is prevalent in all types of society. Women normally land up in the informal sector or work as unpaid family workers compared to men. Women entrepreneurs operate smaller businesses in less lucrative sectors. Women are also much more likely to suffer domestic violence whether in poor or rich countries. As the Gender development Index shows, there is less participation of women in policy making, irrespective of countries' development states. (GDI, UNDP). The Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex1) Database highlighted thatas compared to male (83.05%), only 76.6% of female adults in India have an account with a formal financial institution. (World Bank 2017). A Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report indicates the share of female individual borrowers in total credit stood at 9.8 per cent in terms of amount and 31.3 per cent in number of credit accounts, emphasizing that cultural barriers exist in choice of access to financial services. in September (RBI, 2021; The gender gap in India is 62.5%, mainly due to inadequate representation of women in politics, technical and leadership roles, decline in female labor force participation rate, literacy divide between male and female, income inequality. NSSO latest data has shown that the number of women per thousand males has increased but at the same time, the gender ratio at birth for children born in the last five years is 929, suggesting that preference for male children persists.

#### **4.2 How real empowerment of women can be achieved? – The way forward**

UNDP has cited factors like leadership, nondiscrimination in opportunity, health, safety, education, community engagement, freedom from violence as determining variables in improving their standard in the society. Real empowerment of women in terms of freedom of choice in all spheres of life can be achieved by focusing on factors working on three dimensions, involving personal, relationaland societal. There is a strong causative relationship among personal (Women own self and their attitude towards their own wellbeing), relational (attitude of family members, community to which they belong) and finally societal (at larger social level and national context) variables reinforcing one another.

It is also important to understand that normally women's occupations are considered as a secondary source of income, and they have to give their priority to children and household chores. Therefore, activities need to be home based or nearby. The success of SEWA, MahilaGrih Udyog in various states has shown that women with low-income base can utilize their talent and time. Women can work in processing units like masala powder preparing and selling, papad making, pickle making, chutney powder, spices preparing, garland and broom making etc. They can be gainfully employed in mat making, embroidery, knitting, banana fiber weaving, toys making, artificial jewelry etc.

The independent source of income together with new ideas, values and social support will make the women more confident and assertive of their rights. Ownership and Control over material resources would go a long way to improve women's prestige and status within family and would promote intersperse consultation. Greater control over household resources by women, either through their own earnings or cash transfers, can enhance a country's growth prospects by changing spending in ways that benefit children. Evidence from countries such as Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom show that when women control more household incomeeither through their own earnings or through cash transferschildren benefit because of more spending on food and education (World Bank, 2011). It is suggested that access of

productive resources like land and fertilizers on par with male counterpart, may increase agricultural output in developing countries by as much as 2.5 to 4 percent (FAO, 2011).

Financial inclusion programs should be designed based on comprehensive understanding about women's socio-economic conditions, intra-household bargaining position, and restrictions on mobility. Traditionally, women's lack of access to land and other properties poses significant constraints on their access to credit that require formal ownership of assets as a collateral security. At present, many state governments in India have adopted the default savings options by mandatorily delivering all wages to participants of government schemes and Programs through formal saving accounts. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) has the provision that a minimum of one-third of its beneficiaries should be women and their payments should be delivered via electronic transfers to bank accounts. Additionally, the government allows SHGs to mobilize savings, where a group of women come together and save on a regular basis. Regardless of these policy efforts, institutional savings by women in India are low. Several insurance and pension schemes such as Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana, Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOPS), and widow pension schemes are also available but mostly either the head of the family or one earning member is covered under most of the social security schemes. In general, in low-income household groups, the oldest male is designated as the head of the household or the chief decision maker, regardless of whether he is the primary source of economic support. These interpersonal family power relations and social structure hinders the access of women to government's insurance and pension schemes.

There is no denying the fact that if women want to be heard and respected on different issues specially related to them, they need to be financially strong. Therefore, economic liberation is a very important factor for the betterment of women in overcoming the class and gender discrimination. But economic empowerment may not be sufficient to guarantee real empowerment of women, which is shaped by social, cultural, political, and institutional factors.

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**Annexure 1. Facilitative and Debilitating Factors.**

Variables	Indicators	Implication
Social Norms	1.Women making their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care (% of women age 15-49)	The freedom and capacity of women to make decisions affecting personal circumstances is an important contributor to their overall development.
	2.Women participating in making major household purchase decisions	Indicators measures the relative power distribution in a family
	3.A woman can be head of household in the same way as a man	Measure the decision-making power relation in a family
	4 A woman can choose where to live in the same way as a man	Restrictions on a woman movement to avail different economic and political opportunity.
Health	1.Decision maker about a woman's own health care  2.Access and utilization of available health services	Measures gender divide in one of the important factors shaping labour productivity and human resource
Economic Factors	1.Unemployment with advanced education, female (% of female labor force with advanced education)  2. Expected Years of School, Female	1.Measure Employment and Time Use  Considering women employment as secondary source of income  2.Prioritizing male child education

Leadership	1. Share of female business owners (% of total business owners)  2. Share of female directors (% of total directors)  3. Number of female sole proprietors	1. Measuring women's entrepreneurial activity is critically important for a better understanding of how female entrepreneurs contribute to the economy and society
Asset ownership	1. Women who do not own a house  2. Women with a national identity card or equivalent foundational identity document	1. Restrictions or gender preference in ownership of movable asset calls for strong case for economic empowerment and provides protection in the case of violence,  2. Official or "legal" identity is a fundamental right that also enables to access services and opportunities.
Social attitude	1. Limited public space  2. Gender unfriendly policy  3. Preference over male child	Indicates the degree of differences between actual rights and real realization of rights
Political factors	1. Sexual harassment at work place	Indicate gap between availing the legal rights
Self- perception of women own attitude	1. Delaying Health service utilization  2. Violence against women by female members of family	Indicates the degree of conditioning done to accept their sub-ordinate position under a patriarchal system.

Source- UNDP Gender statistics, 2020, interpretation is compiled by the author.

#### **Annexure 2- Gender statistics in terms of selected parameters**

Parameters	Data sources	Value
Female population (% of total population)	Census 2011	48.5 %
Female Headed house	NSS 2012	Rural (11.5%), Urban (12.4%).
Health – IMR	NSS- 75 <sup>th</sup> round, 2014	34 against 32 for male
Women owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) (%)	NFHS- 5, 2019-21	43.3%
Female sterilization	NSS- 75 <sup>th</sup> round, 2014	Most popular form of contraception

Literacy rate (%)	NFHS- 5, 2019-21	71.5 (female), 84.4 % Male
10 or more years of schooling (%)	NFHS- 5, 2019-21	41.0 (Female), 50.2 (male)
age 15-19 years who are anemic (%)	NFHS- 5, 2019-21	59.1(Female), 31.1(Male)
India ranked	Global Gender Gap Report 2018	108 out of 149 countries
% of women in workforce	2020-UN women	24%
Pay Gap between Men-women	2016- UN women	32.6% (67cent for every dollar earned by men.
Unpaid hours worked by Women	2020- UN	5.8hr
% of managers who are women	2020-UN	13.7%
Violence (as percentage of total female population)	2016-18- NCRB	58.8 %

Source- Compiled by author from various sources.