



ROLE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is one of the most basic human rights as well as a key to sustainable development of the country. It not only enhances status and quality of life of women, but also leads to economic growth, social justice and reduction of poverty. In the recent decades, the policies surrounding the development of women have leant towards not focusing on welfare approach but focusing on participation, leadership and capacity building. In this respect, social entrepreneurship has become a significant empowerment tool through integrating economic creativity with social responsibility. Social entrepreneurship is a business concept that combines social goals and financial sustainability unlike the traditional businesses which are mainly concerned with earning profits and ignoring systemic inequalities. It has a great role in empowering women in India who in most cases have been hindered by education, employment and property rights. Programmes like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) allow women to gain access to financial assets, acquire entrepreneurial abilities and increase their autonomy, engagement and social integration. The paper addresses the way social entrepreneurship can be an empowering factor of women in India.

KEYWORDS: Social Entrepreneurship, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Self-Help Groups, Microfinance, Sustainable Development, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is not only a basic human right but also a very important determinant of national development. In recent decades, women economic participation has moved away from the welfare-based models to the empowerment-based models which focus on capability and participation and leadership (Sen, 1999). The social entrepreneurship has become an essential tool in this process. Social entrepreneurship combines social goals and entrepreneurial innovation in solving social issues unlike the traditional business enterprises that focus on profit (Bornstein and Davis, 2010).

Social entrepreneurship provides new empowerment opportunities in India, where women, who make almost half of the population, experience systemic disadvantages in terms of education, employment, and property ownership. Women have been empowered through initiatives like self-help groups (SHGs), micro-enterprises and cooperative models which have enabled them to gain financial independence, social networks, and leadership. Such interplay of social entrepreneurship and empowerment of women is a paradigm shift, not in the area of dependence and self-determination, not in the area of exclusion and participation in the mainstream economy.

2. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurship is the term that is used to describe the process of recognizing and solving social problems with innovative, sustainable, and market-based solutions. According to Dees (1998), social entrepreneurs are change agents in the social sector who integrate the zeal to a social cause together with the business-like discipline and innovativeness. It is not only about

making a profit but about building quantifiable social value and empowerment.

Social entrepreneurs are working within many sectors: education, health, agriculture, environment and microfinance and come up with models that enhance the welfare of the community and at the same time are sustainable (Mair and Marti, 2006). They are more focused on marginalized groups of people, especially women, and focusing on inclusivity, ethical leadership, and capacity building.

3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment means improving the power of women to make strategic life choices, gain access to resources and shape decision making at other levels (Kabeer, 1999). It entails economic, social, political and psychological aspects. Economic empowerment enables women to have access to income and assets, social empowerment enables them to have more influence in the family and community, political enables them to have more voice in governance and psychological enables them to have self confidence and agency (Malhotra et al., 2002).

In most developing communities, the patriarchal systems limit the role of women in the formal labour market. Social entrepreneurship breaks these limitations by providing the opportunity of working together and learning entrepreneurial skills that enable women to attain economic independence.

4. LINKAGES BETWEEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment and social entrepreneurship are complementary notions. Social enterprises do not only make



income; they also provide environments where gender equity, self esteem and solidarity within a community are encouraged. The relationship may be explained according to a number of dimensions:

4.1 Economic Independence

Social entrepreneurship also provides women with skills of entrepreneurship and management that helps them handle small businesses, borrow and lend money and manage income. This financial autonomy increases their ability to make decisions in families and communities (Datta & Gailey, 2012). They can be micro-enterprises in handicrafts, food processing, textiles and country tourism run by cooperatives and SHGs headed by women.

4.2 Decision-Making and Leadership.

Social ventures tend to transform women entrepreneurs into leaders in the community. They are able to increase their leadership capacity as they handle finances, bargain with stakeholders, and mobilize resources. It goes beyond the workplace and affects the social norms and local governance (Chatterjee and Dasgupta, 2015).

4.3 Social Capital and Collective Action.

Social entrepreneurship promotes partnership, networking and unity. Women in cooperatives or SHGs learn to trust, support and have a vision together. Such social capital is an initiator of the larger community development where it becomes easier to access education, health and sanitation.

4.4 Busting Gender Stereotypes.

Social entrepreneurship complicates the traditional gender roles as it proves the ability of women to be innovative, manage, and lead. Women social entrepreneurs are successful, which makes them role models of other women who get motivated to study and start businesses (Gupta and Mirchandani, 2018).

5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP MODELS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA.

India has also experienced emergence of various innovative social entrepreneurship models which have empowered the women at the ground level.

5.1 Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

SHG movement has been among the strongest tools of women empowerment in rural India. SHGs help women to save collectively, get microcredit and initiate small businesses with the support of the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Other than financial benefits, SHGs increase the power of collective bargaining of women, their social standing and their self-confidence (Puhazhendhi and Satyasai, 2000).

5.2 Microfinance and Microenterprises.

Microfinance institutions (MFIs) such as the Grameen Bank, SEWA Bank and Bandhan Bank have led the way in developing financial inclusion models that specifically aim at women. With

the help of microloans, training and support networks, women acquire control of productive resources resulting in empowerment in the long run (Armendariz and Morduch, 2010).

5.3 Producer and Social Cooperatives.

Cooperatives of women in the dairy, handicraft and agricultural sector like Amul and Lijjat Papad have shown that collective entrepreneurship can provide economic and social benefits. Such businesses will incorporate women in value chains that will guarantee even distribution of income and creating skills (Anand, 2011).

5.4 Social Enterprises that is technology-driven.

Online platforms and online business enterprises have provided women entrepreneurs with new opportunities. Programs such as Rang De, Frontier Markets, and SHEROES are based on technology to bridge geographical and economic divides between rural women producers and urban consumers, and between women producers and consumers located in different regions of the globe.

6. GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Indian government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have launched a number of programs to empower and encourage entrepreneurship by women by using social programs. Programs like Startup India, Stand Up India, Mahila E-Haat and Mission Shakti aid in skill development, availability of finance and digital inclusion of women entrepreneurs. There are also international institutions, including UN Women, the World Bank that offer policy support and funding to women-led social enterprises (UN Women, 2020).

Business schools and universities have established social innovation laboratories, entrepreneurial training centers and incubation centers to equip students particularly women with entrepreneurial thinking, sustainable development, and measurement of impact.

7. CASE ILLUSTRATIONS

7.1 Lijjat Papad

Lijjat Papad started as a multi-crore cooperative of more than 40,000 women in 1959 by seven women in Mumbai. It has been successful based on the principles of self reliance, cooperation and shared ownership. The business does not just offer revenue, but also self-respect, talent building, and group empowerment.

7.2 Self Employed Women Association (SEWA).

SEWA is an organization that empowers women in the informal sector through self-employment, cooperative business and labor rights advocacy, which was founded by Ela Bhatt in 1972. It is an entrepreneurial version of social welfare, a prototype of social innovation by women.

7.3 Mann Deshi Foundations

The Mann Deshi Foundation was established by Chetna Sinha in Maharashtra to provide rural women with microfinance, business



training and digital literacy. It has empowered thousands of women to become business owners, gain access to markets and boosting of household earnings.

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing Access to Finance: Improve gender-responsive credit policies and promote collaboration between the government and the business sector in order to empower women social entrepreneurs.

- **Capacity Building:** Continuous training on business management, financial literacy, and digital skills.
- **Networking and Mentorship:** establish mentorship initiatives that will link successful women entrepreneurs and upcoming women leaders.
- **Institutional support:** Have incubation centers and innovation hubs that focus on women-led social enterprises.
- **Recognition and Incentives:** Award fellowships, tax incentives and awards to influential female social entrepreneurs.
- **Awareness and Advocacy:** Intensify awareness campaign to break the gender stereotypes and establish entrepreneurship as an acceptable career choice among women.

9. CONCLUSION

Inclusion of innovation, social mission, and sustainability has made social entrepreneurship to be the revolution system of female empowerment. It enhances the availability of finance, leadership and community participation and inclusive development and poverty reduction among women. As it has been practiced among the Indians, women being able to be economically empowered through social enterprise are not only beneficial to the household but to the entire community. The policies need to be supported all the time, the institutions need to be involved working together with the social appreciation to attain the full potential of women as agents of change. Social entrepreneurship is an effective tool towards empowering women through innovation, social intention, and financial sustainability. It helps women to break through the structural barriers, build self confidence, and play an important role in community development. Indian experience shows that when women are empowered in the form of social enterprise the gains are not only limited to individual households but also trigger the inclusive

growth, reduction of poverty and social change. There is need to have sustained policy support, institutional cooperation and social recognition in order to achieve the full potential of women in nation-building. The empowerment of women as a result of social entrepreneurship is a developmental concern as well as a moral and strategic necessity to build a just and sustainable future.

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