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## MEASUREMENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social, educational, gender, or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Empowerment is then the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalised people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively. The main objective of this paper is to review the indicators of measurement of women empowerment in the context of vast literature.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Economic participation, Educational Attainment, Health Status.

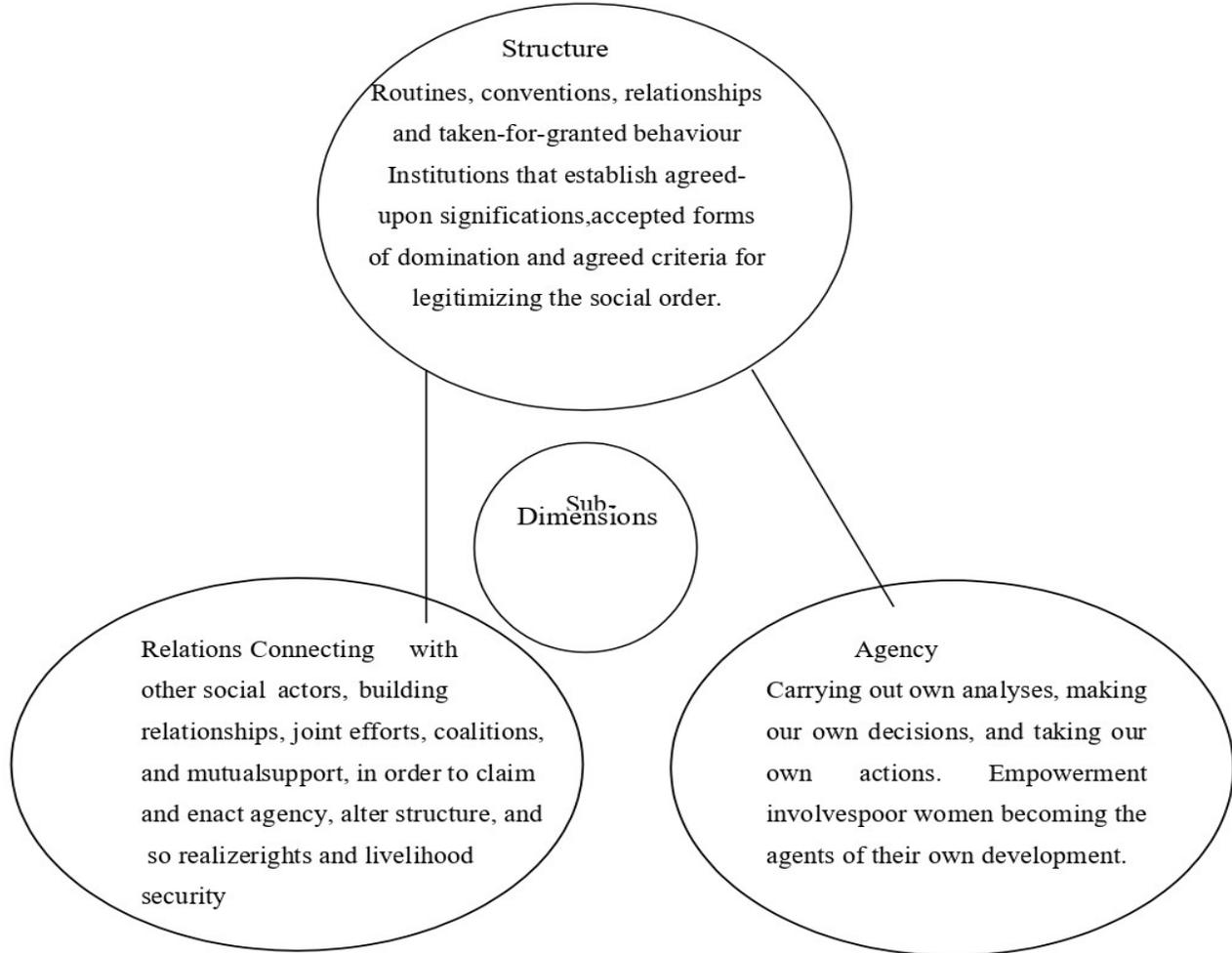
### INTRODUCTION

One of the key underlying causes of poverty is the construction in different contexts of what it means to be a man, or a woman. Gender is, in this sense, one manifestation of a general model of power which holds that individual and group behaviours produce social structures (ideologies, rules, institutions) which, in turn, reinforce and “normalise” those behaviours to the point where they are seen as common sense, as the “normal” order of things, identities, roles, and relationships are, in this view of things, socially constructed, as are the constraints and opportunities that certain actors face regarding control of, access to, and use of tangible and intangible resources.

Gendered forms of power come into play in the social construction of identities, roles, relationships and distribution of resources, all of which are intimately related to women's human rights and the question of poverty. These gendered "rules of the game" are not always perfectly obvious to women and men who live by them but can be surfaced, discussed, and challenged through personal and collective consciousness and actions.

In this way, women and men contest the flow of resources, agendas and ideologies. With this conceptualisation of power and social change, empowerment should be conceived of as both process and outcome that comprises three dimensions namely, agency, structure, and relationships. These three dimensions are intimately related, structuring and influencing one another. The graph below helps to visualize the way that agency, structure and relational dynamics interact to create an empowerment process. In order to be in a position to have a sustainable impact on women's empowerment, CARE projects must in some way, shape, or form, be targeting changes in all three dimensions of women's empowerment.

**Figure- 1: Dimensions of Women Empowerment**



There is no one, uniform causal pathway. Causation can flow from any of the three dimensions to one another. There is no guarantee that changes in one dimension led to changes in any of the other two. Processes of empowerment are nonlinear: individual or group empowerment can come and go, weaken and strengthen, move forward freeze, or regress. Sustainable changes in empowerment are only possible when changes occur across all three dimensions.

**2. Criteria for Measurement**

Five important dimensions of female empowerment and opportunity have been chosen for examination, based mainly on the findings of UNIFEM, concerning global patterns of inequality between men and women are discussed below.

**2.1. Economic Participation**

The economic participation of women, their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms, is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encourage economic development in countries as a whole. The societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.

Economic participation concerns not only the actual numbers of women participating in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. Worldwide, outside of the agricultural sector, in both developed and developing countries, women are



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still averaging slightly less than 78% of the wages given to men for the same work, a gap which refuses to close in even the most developed countries. While globalisation has generated opportunities for local producers and entrepreneurs to reach international markets, it has at times intensified existing inequalities and insecurities for many poor women, who already represent two-thirds of the world's poorest people.

Since the gains of globalisation are often concentrated in the hands of those with higher education, those who own resources and have access to capital poor women are usually the least able to seize the longer-term opportunities offered. Instead, as demonstrated in East Asia in the 1990s, it is all too often the case that women are only able to secure employment during rapid expansions, employment that is usually transitory and insecure, and performed under harsh conditions.

Globalisation has dramatically changed the conditions under which the struggle for gender equality must be carried out, especially in developing countries. One of the important tools of gender mainstreaming, aimed principally at poverty reduction, has been the concept of "gender budgeting," i.e. focusing attention in the process of budget formulation within a given country in order to assess whether a particular fiscal measure will increase or decrease gender equality, or leave it unchanged. Close monitoring and analysis of gender effects has become a mechanism for holding policy-makers increasingly accountable for the impact of policies on the lives of both women and men, so that the large percentage of women who participate economically in the informal sector, and who in some parts of the world provide upwards of 70 per cent of agricultural labour, and produce over 90 per cent of the food, yet are nowhere represented in budget deliberations that can be taken into account in the economic adjustment measures which might directly affect their welfare.

## 2.2. Economic Opportunity

The economic opportunity concerns the quality of women's economic involvement beyond their mere presence as workers. This is a particularly serious problem in developed countries, where women may gain employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either concentrated in poorly paid or unskilled job "ghettos," characterised by the absence of upward mobility and opportunity. This is most commonly the result of negative or obstructive attitudes, and of legal and social systems which use maternity laws and benefits to penalise women economically for child birth and child care responsibilities, and discourage or actively prevent men from sharing family responsibilities. The globalisation of female labour is a phenomenon which crosses all cultural boundaries, and professions, affecting women in virtually all countries. Internationally, women are most often concentrated in "feminised" professions, such as nursing and teaching, office work, care of the elderly and disabled termed "horizontal occupational segregation", where they tend to remain in lower job categories than men. Typically, because these functions are carried out by women, they are the lowest paid, in addition to offering limited or no opportunity for advancement. The term "feminisation of poverty" is often used to illustrate the fact that the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on US\$1 a day or less are women and that the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has not lessened, but may will have widened in the past decade.

At the other end of the spectrum, advancement within professions, such as law, medicine and engineering, in which women are increasingly well represented in developed countries, is of great concern. One survey of graduates carried out by Yale Law Women points to the growing numbers of women attorneys (25-35 per cent), only a small number of whom are partners in firms (5-15 per cent), and to the importance of what they call "family-friendly" and "female-friendly" practices in the profession. United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) figures indicate that the vast majority of the world's countries offer paid maternity leave, often with a guaranteed wage of 50-100 per cent of salary. Interestingly, the United States offers women 12 weeks, but with no pay whatsoever, putting it in league with Lesotho, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea.

## 2.3. Political Empowerment

Political Empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The Inter-Parliamentary Union reports a world average of only 15.6 per cent in combined houses of parliament. The statistics by region offer few surprises, ranging from 6.8 per cent in the Arab States to 18.6 per cent in the Americas, and 39.7 per cent in the Nordic states. While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, they are rarer still in the upper echelons of decision-making. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national, regional and local priorities, i.e., how resources are allocated and typically defined without meaningful input from women, whose life experience gives them a different awareness of the community's needs, concerns and interests from that of men.



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For example, a study in three widely differing countries (Bolivia, Cameroon and Malaysia) showed that women to have a greater say in spending priorities, they would be far more likely to spend family and community resources for improving health, education, community infrastructure and the eradication of poverty, as opposed to the military, alcohol or gambling. Indeed, the demand for changed priorities is heard from virtually all women's organisations, from the most advanced and politically survey in developed countries, to fledgling women's NGOs in the developing world. However, in order for spending and development priorities to change, there must be at least a critical mass of women represented, who are learning the rules, using the rules and changing the rules of the decision-making "game" and thus having an impact on discourse and decisions at all levels, from the family, to the nation, to the international community. Here, we have measured the dimension of political empowerment by using data on the number of female ministers, seats in parliament held by women, women holding senior and legislative and managerial positions.

#### 2.4. Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment is the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence. Moreover, the risk increases for society as a whole that the next generation of children will be similarly ill-prepared. If, as a broad body of empirical work has shown, education and literacy reduce mortality rates of children including the bias toward female child mortality and help reduce fertility rates, the importance of literacy for women is all the greater, considering that women still constitute two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. Although the ECOSOC statistics show that girls actually outnumber boys in tertiary level education in a very few countries, an obvious gender gap in education tends to appear early in most countries and grows more severe with each year of education. In addition, the number of women represented among tertiary level educators is lower than men among primary level educators.

However, if the content of the educational curriculum and the attitudes of teachers serve merely to reinforce prevalent stereotypes and injustices, then the mere fact of literacy and education does not, in and of itself, close the gender gap; schooling as a catalyst for change in gender relations will be more effective only if appropriate attention is also given to curriculum content and the retraining of those who deliver it. Information and communication technologies, which have become a potent driving force of the development process, represent yet another dimension in which a knowledge gap has emerged between women and men: a gender-based digital divide. A study by the USAID has found that countless women in the developing world are further removed from the information age because of their lower levels of education and deeply ingrained negative attitudes towards other forms of achievement. "Without access to information technology, an understanding of its significance and the ability to use it for social and economic gain, women in the developing world will be further marginalised from the mainstream of their communities, their countries and the world.

#### 2.5. Health and Well-Being

It is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organisation, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America quotes estimates that of the annual 46 million abortions worldwide, some 20 million are performed unsafely, resulting in the deaths of 80,000 women from complications, accounting for at least 13 per cent of global maternal mortality, and causing a wide range of long-term health problems.

Women's particular vulnerability to violence is perhaps the most obvious aspect of reduced physical security and integrity of person, but one which is perhaps the least amenable to accurate statistics. Even Sweden, long recognised as a leader in the area of gender equality was recently called to task by Amnesty International, which stated that "the prevalence of gender-based violence shatters many people's image of Sweden as being the most gender equal country in the world". A recent front-page article in the International Herald Tribune also noted that the implementation of violence-related laws in Sweden was marred by "spotty prosecutions, vague statistics, old-fashioned judges and unresponsive governments".

The complexity of the social and cultural issues, combined with the stigma and fear of disclosure lead to a situation where only a small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse, wife battering and gun-related violence are ever reported, making accurate data extremely difficult to obtain. Indeed, it is difficult to measure the true extent of violence against women as most incidences of domestic violence and sexual assault go unreported. It is typical for women themselves to be blamed for "provoking" the violence perpetrated against them by men often those closest to them. The victims of such violence are then frequently stigmatised and isolated in society, even forced into marriage with their violators, with little or no control over their own persons. Each year an



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estimated two million girls, usually aged 4 to 8, are forcibly subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) which routinely leads to death, chronic infection and bleeding, nerve tumors, obstructed childbirth, painful scarring, etc. Although most prevalent in Africa and the Middle East, the practice of some form of FGM has been reported among immigrant communities in parts of Asia and the Pacific, North and South America and Europe.

### 3. GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

#### 3.1. Reservations

The Government of India has made structural provisions to uplift the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Caste, through a policy of reservations or protective discrimination. Protective discrimination is an affirmative state action that promotes Sanskritisation process among the Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Caste person changes his or her customs, ritual ideology and way of life in the direction of higher castes. Reservations prevent total injustice promotes social mobility and leads to class-consciousness among the Scheduled Castes besides guaranteeing a minimum share. The policy of reservations has helped mostly those who are now in the higher income groups; but only less than 5 percent in rural areas got jobs through reservations. The civil rights enforcement cell that is expected to look into the non-implementation of reservations and economic deprivations of the Scheduled Castes is more a laughing stock than a helpful agency as it has no power to investigate and proceeds further.

Besides, a long tradition of oppression and servitude makes it difficult for the Scheduled Castes to developed in a short time the confidence they required for the Total utilisation of the benefits provide by the government suggests that while. Reservation policy is a must, it should not impair talent and excellence. One of the consequences of reservations, however, is that they will accentuate the alienation of Scheduled castes, so they will continue to be a separate category to enjoy the benefits of reservations and thus remains un-integrated with the mainstream of the society.

#### 3.2. Social legislation

Constitution of India has made special provisions for the welfare of women. Article 50 of the Constitution provides special status and protection of women and to this extent equates them with those who belong to the deprived section of society. The directive principle of state policy (article 39) provides equal pay for equal work irrespective of their sex. Article 243 and article 243(1) provide various laws passed for the protection and safeguard of women and their rights like Hindu marriage and Divorce Act, 1955, Hindu Succession Act 1956, Hindu Guardianship Act 1956, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 1999 and Domestic Violence Bill, 2000.

The various laws were enacted to raise the social status of women have failed to remove social prejudices and social inequalities. In India, laws are violated with impunity without fear of any deterrent action or social disapproval. Every day we read in the newspaper about dowry deaths, rape, abduction, trafficking of women, sexual harassment at work place and eve teasing in buses and streets. Government has passed legislation to curb the misuse of amniocentesis techniques (1975) for sex selection and abortion of female foetus. In 1971 there were 930 females for every 1000 males. A decade later this figure had increased to 934, but by 2001, instead of continuing to rise, the ratio dropped to 933, lower than the 1971 figure. The sex ratio is one of the lowest in the world. Even the woman who espouses feminism chooses to abort a female child in her womb. The woman herself has internalised social bias against a female child and in favour of male child. Pre- Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 that came into force on January 1, 1996 has failed to check aborting of female foetus. The PNDT clinics are flourishing in cities and towns. Mobiles clinics are also functional in the field.

The fact is that women's exploitation is a reality and gender justice is fragile myth. Unless there is recognition of her rights by her counterpart, her basic rights, gender justice would only be a "lip service" with no tangible results. Fight for justice by women or cry for gender equality is not a fight against men. It is a fight against traditions that have chained them, a fight against attitude that is ingrained in the society. In India, Indian Penal Code sections 354 (Criminal assault of women to outrage women's modesty) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of woman) provide relief to victims of sexual harassment. The Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill 2007 is designed to defend women against sexual abuse.

**Table 1: Census – Wise Literacy Rates: 1901-2001**

Years of Census	Total Population (Lakhs)	Literacy Rates (%) Percentages		
		Male	Female	Total
1901	2383.96	9.83	0.06	5.39



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1911	2520.93	10.56	1.05	5.92
1921	2513.21	12.21	1.81	7.16
1931	2789.77	15.59	2.93	9.50
1941	3889.97	24.90	7.30	16.10
1951	3610.88	27.16	8.86	18.33
1961	4389.36	40.40	15.34	28.33
1971	5479.49	45.95	21.97	34.45
1981	6851.84	56.50	29.85	43.67
1991	8439.31	64.13	39.32	52.21
2001	10,270.15	75.85	54.16	65.38
2011	12,108.54	82.14	55.46	74.04

Source: Census Report, Registrar General and Commissioner, Census Operations, Government of India, New Delhi.

Table 1 reveals that the literacy rates of male and female population in total population over the years of census in India. It has been observed that in 1901, the female literacy rate was only 0.60 per cent as against 9.83 per cent among males. In 1941 Census, it had increased to 7.30 per cent which was less than 50 percent of the total literacy rate of 16.10 per cent. The literacy rate among female was 29.85 and 39.32 percent as against 43.67 and 52.21 per cent for males in 1981 and 1991 respectively. In 2001 Census, women constitute about 54.16 percent of the total population in India. In 2011 Census, female literacy rate was marginally increased to 55.46 per cent when compare to male literacy. In Table 2, the female sex ratio over the Census period revealed that there is significant decrease in the sex ratio over the census periods but at was increased to 943 per 1000 males in 2011 census.

**Table 2: Female Sex Ratio in India**

Years	Sex Ratio
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	926
2001	933
2011	943

Source: Census of India 2011.

**Table 3: Work Participation Rates (in percent)**

Census	R/U/T	MALE	FEMALE	PERSONS
1981	Rural	53.8	23.1	38.8
	Urban	49.1	8.3	30.0
	Total	52.6	19.7	36.7
1991	Rural	52.6	26.8	40.1
	Urban	48.9	9.2	30.2
	Total	51.6	22.3	37.5



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2001	Rural	52.4	31.0	42.0
	Urban	50.9	11.6	32.2
	Total	51.9	25.7	39.3
2011	Rural	53.50	30.0	42.0
	Urban	53.00	15.4	34.2
	Total	53.26	25.51	39.4

Source: Census of India, Government of India.

Table 3 presents the detailed status of female work participation in India. There has been a slight increase in the female participation rate from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.7 percent in 2001, but declined marginally to 25.56 which is still much lower than male work participation rate in both urban and rural areas.

### POLICY SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development to enable them to realise their full potential.
2. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social and cultural.
3. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the Nation.
4. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety & social security.
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
6. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

### CONCLUSION:

Even there are several measurement tools for women empowerment, they are still lagging behind men in empowerment, but in recent times there is significant improvement in women empowerment. The recent emphasis on the thinking that women can also contribute to the economy of the nation led social scientists, policy makers and administrators to device ways of development planned entrepreneurship with reference to women. However, the government of India is implementing schemes to ensure such as rural development, labour, education, health, science and technology, social welfare, women and child development etc. The Government of India has framed and announced its development strategies through Five Year Plans. The Planners laid stress on promoting education of women through enrolling larger number of girls in schools. They also stated that the effort at education should keep in mind that a large majority of women will have to bring up children and manage their households in an economical and efficient manner.

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