Widening of economic status in India: A rural-urban disparity

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ABSTRACT

The progress of any country depends on the financial status of women. If we take India as the case, the empirical results show there is a huge economic disparity which exists even among women in India. This paper is an attempt made to throw a light on the disparity which exists among women of rural and urban India on the basis of the most recent survey done by NSS. The paper will also highlight the gender disparity which exist in India, especially as women constitute 48.5% of the total Indian population.

Keywords-- Rural, Women, India, Urban, population, economic

I. INTRODUCTION

Women’s economic empowerment is a prerequisite for continuous development, pro-poor growth and attainment of all the MDGs. Moreover, it is about rights and equitable societies. Economic empowerment states, a woman is economically empowered when she has both the aptitude to achieve something as well as move forward economically and has the authority to make as well as act on economic decisions.

- the aptitude to achieve something as well as move forward economically, women require the skills and resources to compete in markets, as well as just stand equal access to economic institutions.
- To have the authority and agency to benefit from economic activities, women require to have the capability to construct and proceed on decisions and control resources and earnings¹

Why Economic empowerment matters

Increasing the role of women in the economy is part of the solution to the financial and economic crises and is critical for economic resilience and growth. The economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for continuous development, pro-poor growth and attainment of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Rural-urban disparities

Particularly in post-colonial countries, rural-urban disparity have for long been one of the causes of concern for the policymakers. India is the largest democracy with consistent economic growth rate since independence. In agriculture India produces groundnut, sugarcane, wheat, rice, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, milk in abundant quantity. As far as the demographic profile is concerned more than 720 billion i.e. one third of its population live in rural areas. In spite of these developments, there is a huge gap between rural and urban India².

Actual empowerment of women greatly depends on encouraging environment to be developed, which provides the socio-economic rights to women; so that women, on the basis of equality, are helpful in the process of decision making. The overall development of country is only possible, when all the weak and deprived section of women is included in the mainstream development.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the economic status of women
2. To find out the female work participation rate as compared with men.

1. To explain rural-urban women disparity on the basis of selected economic indicators
2. To examine the economic status of rural and urban women.

III. METHODOLOGY
The present study is based on secondary data collection. It is collected by various published sources like Census Report, NSS Report, Newspapers, Books, Journal, Magazine, etc.

IV. FINDINGS

Let us visualize the economic situation of women in India on the basis of the following parameters:

Employment/ Participation in the paid economy

Employment- In India- According to Census 2011, India’s total female population is 587.45 Million (48.5 percent)³.

As per the ILO’s Global Employment Trends 2013 report, the labor force participation rate for Indian women knocked down from just over 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 29 per cent in 2009-10. From the 131 countries with available data, India’s position is 11th from the bottom in female labor force participation⁴.

According to a recent survey by the polling agency Gallup, customary outlook may lead many college-educated women to leave the workforce after marriage, or after having children, to look on family life instead. This is one of the many reasons white-collar companies find it hard to recruit or keep female workers. Women who have progressed ahead of high school make up only about 6.5 percent of Indian women of working age (in India this is considered to be between the ages of 15 and 59). As with men, the majority of the feminine workforce in India is unskilled and has only a basic education. They are working – just not in corporate that require college degrees and English skills; they are frequently working in unorganized sectors⁵. As far as rural women are concerned white-collar companies are a distinct dream for them as illiteracy level is high among rural women almost as high as 58 percent as compared to 79 percent among urban women. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India⁶.

If we look at the above figure, we see that while there is an approximate difference of Rs. 120 among wages earned by women as compared with men in rural India and there is an approximate difference of Rs.165 among women of rural and urban India. It shows the inconsistency in the wages earned by rural women in India especially a concern for all of us when majority of our population lives in rural areas.

If we talk in terms of casual labours, there is a difference of Rs. 46 among women of rural India as compared with rural men and of Rs. 7 if we compare the wages earned by rural women in comparison with urban female. Now, in both the cases, women earn less than their male counterparts and again the rural women are economically weakest among them all.

The contribution of regular wage/salaried employment in the female workforce of urban areas is much higher as compared to rural areas - about 43 per cent in urban areas and only 6 per cent in the rural areas. This figure is self-explanatory which states that there is a huge illiteracy among rural women. The contribution of casual labor in the total workforce of rural areas is about 35 per cent as against the contribution of 15 per cent in the urban areas. Again, this figure highlights the fact that the daily labour/contract labour problem is pertinent among rural areas.

- Source: NSS 68th Round, Key indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India⁷

- Source: NSS 68th Round, Key indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India⁸

- Source: NSS 68th Round, Key indicator of Employment and Unemployment in India⁹
women and in a way, indirectly related to the level of literacy among rural women.

Fig 4: Work participation rate by gender, rural-urban divide

![Graph showing work participation rate by gender, rural-urban divide.](image)

Source: NSS Reports on Employment and Unemployment in India, various rounds 9,10,11

Gender-based differences in work force participation rate is a constant feature of the Indian labor market. The National Sample Survey estimates that women’s work participation rate is 24.8 percent as compared to 54.3 percent among men in rural India. The distinction becomes wider in urban areas. Over the seven year period - 2004-05 to 2011-12, the WPR for women declined from 28.7 percent in 2004-0511 to 21.9 percent in 2011-1212.

Female labor force participation rate is, however, fewer than half of that of men. The above figure reveals that 21.9 percent of women are in the labor force as compared to 54.4 percent of men. Even it is clear from the graph that while rural women have a share of 24.8 percent, urban women have a share of only 14.7 percent in the development of the country. Rural women share a chunk as compared to urban women when it comes to workforce participation rate. However, the major concern for all the policymakers is that over the years, there is a gradual decrease in the women participation rate from 28.7 in 2004-5 to 21.9 percent in 2011-12.

More women work as casual workers comparative to men. They undertake casual work to increase their/family income. 40 percent of the rural women workers are casual workers (those working on day-to-day basis)12 an increase from 32.6 percentin 2004-0513.

Women’s access to credit and have power over assets

One of the important factors which lead to the poor economic status of especially rural women, is the absence of land ownership “patta”. Women continue to work in the lands of men whose ownership of title is not with them. Women do not have access to any credit or assets being derived from that land and hence she works as the puppet of men.

Women’s unremunerated productive work

Another limitation factor of women is that the domestic work being undertaken by women is not counted much in the GDP. Women as a dual role- works in the household, raise her children, look after the elderly people, but all these works are not counted as remunerated. It is considered as a part of the women’s birth and again it leads to her exploitation.

As rightly said by Confucius, “In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of”.

As per Census Data on ‘Female Headed Households’ released on Friday by Minister of State for Home Affairs, only 11% households in India are headed by female. As per Census 2011, there are around 49 lac single-member female households, of which three-fourth are in rural areas. In a telling state of affairs in India, roughly 18 per cent of female-headed households had to travel more 500 Meters in urban areas and one km in rural areas to get drinking water. Around 45 per cent female-headed households live in one-room premises and around 42.5 per cent of female headed households use LPG/PNG as a fuel for cooking. Around 29 per cent of female headed households do not possess any asset such as radio/TV/telephone/bicycle/scooter/Car. On the other hand, in respect of male headed households, only 16.5 per cent have no assets14.

V. CONCLUSION

From the above study, it is clear that there is a huge economic disparity among women of rural India as compared with their counterparts’ men and urban women. Women in rural India do not have access to even basic necessities which a normal citizen in India has the right.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important step is we must begin the ground level framework. It is only possible women come together as a unifying force against the atrocities being done over them and assume the role of leadership.

It is very essential that the development programmes for empowerment of women are not done half-heartedly. The government needs to have a mechanism to keep a check on all the schemes and developmental programmes so that there are no lacunae in the proper implementation of the programme.

The vocational training opportunities must be made mandatory even at the tehsil level which will help in reducing the gap between men and women.

Achieving women’s economic empowerment is not a “quick fix”. It will take sound public policies, an overall development approach and long-term commitment.
from all development sectors. We need to start with women by integrating gender-specific perspectives at the design stage of policy and programming.

More equitable access to assets and services - land, water, technology, innovation and credit, banking and financial services - will strengthen women’s rights, increase agricultural productivity and will accelerate economic growth. Infrastructure programmes should be designed to maximise poor women's access to the benefits of roads, facilities for transportation, increased telecommunications services.

Women experience barriers in almost every aspect of work. Indian women require ample employment opportunities to take care of their economic aspect. At the same time women perform the bulk of unpaid work. Care needs to be taken to provide Indian women their due recognition and a position in the economic development of the country.

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