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Women Education: Need for Sustainable Development

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Abstract- Women are the backbone of any civilized society. Be it a role of friend, daughter, sister, wife, mother or a role of a working women, women have facilitated this male dominant society in every aspect. Women constitute approximately 50% of the World's population. But she does not have equal share at, nutrition, work place, property ownership and especially education. Though the law ensures equality in men and women in all aspects, yet still there are many women who remain uneducated due to orthodoxicity, security concerns, traditions and cultures etc. of many societies worldwide. Sustainable Development is that kind of development which aims at meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Hence if it is needed, we need to concentrate on women education which still remains an unattainable goal in India since independence. In the words of Shahi Tharoor (Times of India, 2013), "Even today after 65 years of Independence, the literacy rate of women is just at 65.5% compared to the more healthy 82.1% for men". So if we want India to develop and to sustain that development, women education need a serious concern. This paper is an attempt to throw lights on various aspects related to women education and its need for sustainable development so that the future remains bright.

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Women Education: Need for Sustainable Development

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I. Introduction

United Nations General Assembly in its 57th meeting in December 2002, proclaimed 2005-2014 as *UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*. It emphasizes education of all to be an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development. The *vision* of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.

Women plays important and varied roles from home to society to workplace as a homemaker, societal well being and job provider and job seeker respectively. Her role is of paramount interest to the economy as she contributes near about 50 % of the world population. Her education is essential for sustainable development as Greg Mortenson says,

"If you teach a boy, you educate an individual; but if you *teach a girl,* you educate a community."

A woman is a teacher, a mother, a politician, an employer or an employee etc. She is said to be the first teacher of a man. The values given by her to the children remains throughout with them and guide their way in all walks of life. It is hence she, if being educated for sustainable development can bring a drastic change in life not only of hers but for the future generations too. Sustainable Development is nothing but utilizing the present facilities and technologies etc. without compromising the needs of the future generations to meet their own. This is what can be better done by educating the women.

II. Pillars of Sustainable Development

There are three pillars of Sustainable Development viz, *society, environment and economy.* ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) equally addresses these three pillars of sustainable development with *culture* as an essential additional and underlying dimension. These pillars enable all individuals to fully develop the knowledge, values and skills that are necessary to improve their quality of life. These pillars are not that supportive to the female counterpart in many countries and hence are not good for sustainable development.

a) *Society*

Society is the place where a person lives, grows and practices culture. The society plays an important role in upliftment as well as deterioration of an individual. Society is not much favorable to women as data reflects. 2013 global review of available data says that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced violence either physically and/or sexually more than once in their life. This figure falls to 30% only when violence against women by intimate partners was studied. In India, the distribution pattern of crimes against women too has not changed much in the last few years, but between 2001 and 2011, the overall number of incidents of crime against women rose steadily, and was 59% higher than that in 2001. This is one of the aspect. Women are far low in education, economic participation, physical safety and health etc. Issues. In such a society, how can one think of sustainable development or even development?

b) *Environment*

Environmnet consists of those surroundings which are experienced by a person in the form of his parents, siblings, neighbours and peer group etc.. These people put direct and indirect pressure on an

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individual to behave in an acceptable manner. In India only, female child population in the age group of 0-6 years was 78.83 million in 2001 which declined to 75.84 million in 2011. The reason is not letting the female child to take birth and if she has somehow taken birth, killing her by any of the popular method by family members or mothers under the pressure of family members. In such an environment, where the existence of female has become questionable, sustainable development cannot be achieved.

c) *Economy*

In the World, as a proportion of male economic participation, female participation in the labor force has remained constant at 65% between 1991 and 2009. In India, the female participation in labor force is 29% only. It has become a global consensus too that approximately 30% female representation in key political decision-making positions is needed for women to bring about significant and meaningful change. In the 46 countries with lower or single chamber parliament, data available for 2010 says that women representatives comprised less than 10% in 20 countries. In such an economy, sustainable development will be far reaching dream.

If we really need sustainable development, these pillars need to be channelized to work in favour of women and educating women can be the first step to it.

III. Educating Women for Sustainable Development

Education for all is on World agenda. In India also, as per RTE Act, 2009, Education is the fundamental right of every child irrespective of sex, color, caste and creed. But in reality, that is exactly not the case especially for women. Mostly sons are being sent to schools for the study. Again the drop out rates of girls are more than that of boys at elementary stage. Today, nearly 17% of the world's adult population is illiterate. Two third of them are women. Approximately, 122 million youth globally are illiterate, of which young women represent 60.7%. So far as literacy rate in India is concerned, it is 82% of males and 65% of females according to 2011 census. So educating women should be the foremost priority of every Government of any country if they want to develop. If we talk of Education for sustainable development, then it again becomes priori to all other agendas.

a) *How does Educating Women help in sustainable Development?*

ESD is for everyone, at all walks of life and in all possible learning contexts. Education for Sustainable Development helps every individual to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable and better future. It also requires participatory and developing society, economy and environment for sustainable development. This participation will be complete only if women are given their due place everywhere without any kind of gender discrimination. Hence educating Women helps in multifold ways to achieve the goal of sustainable development as discussed below:

i. *Employment*

Education is a great tool to impart knowledge, develop motor abilities, change the attitude and improve the self confidence. It increases employment opportunities, income and self dependence. Employment gives the income and improves the economic position of the women. Employed women are given due importance by the family members. Hence educating women can prove to be a prime factor to bring gender equality, upliftment of women and sustainable development.

ii. *Economic Independence*

Woman economic and political participation is quite low. So her economic independence has been in question for the ages. Education helps women to get employment which in turn helps in getting economic independence. Economic independence frees the women from the dependency position and boost her self confidence. Such a woman helps in the national economic development and hence in Sustainable development.

iii. *Empowerment*

Educated Women is empowered. She is aware of her own rights and duties. She asks society to accept her as an equal gender like male. She avails of all opportunities of development and national participation and hence plays a significant role in Sustainable development.

iv. *Self-confidence*

Women need self confidence to fight against all the atrocities against her and to live a self esteemed and respected life. Hence, education helps in bringing in her this self confidence.

v. *Decision Making*

In many societies especially Indian societies, the decision making power lies with men. Mostly males take the importance decisions in the family and in the society. The one aspect to this is also the less education of the females. Hence, in order to end this gender discrimination, education empowers women with decision making power which helps in Sustainable development.

IV. Conclusion

A nation or society, without the participation of women cannot even achieve the development; sustainable development is hence a far reaching dream. So if we want to achieve sustainable development, Women education is the need of the hour which must be

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given due consideration at both societal and Government levels.

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